

Write That Play

By

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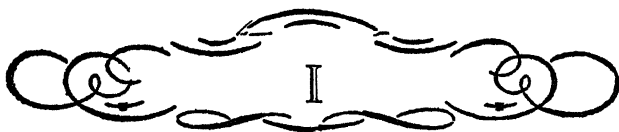
NEW YORK

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THE EAGLE SCREAMS

OR

DRAMA OVER AMERICA

ONE out of every seven adult members of the population of the United States bought an automobile last year, one out of every ten a radio, and one out of thirty-six an electric refrigerator. Approximately one out of every seventy-five adults in the United States wrote a play last year. That means, in a round number, one million plays.' Playwriting in this country is now in the field of big-production statistics. We are entering upon an era of unprecedentedly widespread activity in drama.

A recent survey among drama agents and producers in New York established forty thousand as a conservative estimate of the number of play manuscripts submitted in a year. Out of ten years of teaching playwriting at the University of Michigan and varied associations with the playwriting activity of the state and country at large, I am sure it is safe to estimate at least twenty-five plays written for every one that reaches New York, or one million plays a year.

It was further learned from the survey that except for a concentration from New York and Hollywood the flood of manuscripts reaching the drama agents' desks comes almost uniformly from every part of the country, and from every class of people. Three plays I saw on one agent's desk, his morning mail, were from a rancher in Montana, a major in South Carolina, and a young woman, a university student in Illinois. It is evident that playwriting is becoming one of the great national passions and bonds of fellowship, like bridge, golf, and dancing the big apple.

Yet it is a woeful fact that these thousands of plays come from a theatre-starved nation, from a generation which has grown up on moving pictures. Any agent or producer will testify that he does well to find one play in twenty that shows acquaintance with even the rudiments of dramatic construction, of the necessities of the play as a form. It is a not infrequent occurrence for the outline of a plot to be submitted under the impression that dialogue is created by the actors. That, at any rate, is a tribute to the convincing delivery of the actors whom the author has sometime heard in a play. However, it is not the manuscripts which show no knowledge at all that depress the agents and producers. It is the wealth of manuscripts with potentialities, lost for lack of a little fuller and more exact knowledge. In general the report is that with four or five times as many plays to choose from as ten years ago there is no proportionate increase in the number of plays that can be considered for production. That is why the professional theatre world has shown constructive interest in the development of the playwriting instruction that has arisen the past few years in colleges, universities and theatre schools, and in the healthy growth of college and community theatres.

The widespread eagerness to write a play is something new. Literary agents have told me that a few years ago they were receiving one play to two novels, while now, with as many or more novels coming in, there are two plays to every novel. Such a phenomenon deserves question. When I asked John Rumsey, president of the Associated Authors' Representatives, for an explanation, he looked drearily at the stack of manuscripts on his desk and said he guessed it was the depression; when people didn't have anything else to do they sat down and wrote a play.

Depression and recession leisure, however, will not do as an explanation of the increase in playwriting, or there would have been an even greater increase in novels, for the novel is the easier and more natural form for the inexperienced. The very fact that the country is theatre-starved is in part responsible. The love of the theatre is age-old and inherent. If some cataclysm were to wipe all existence of the theatre

from the face of the earth, it would not take long for human nature to evolve it again. Take drama from a people and they will create drama themselves. Meanwhile, although the centralization in a single city is a condition to be decried and corrected, the professional theatre in New York City is producing a drama of such vitality that stimulus from it reaches throughout the country. It is not the glamour of fabulous fortune for the author of a Broadway hit that stirs so many people to write plays and send them to New York, but the glamour of the theatre itself, the only theatre of which they are aware.

(Further, the turning to drama is the most natural expression of the age in which we live, for drama is the most dynamic of the literary forms, the most challenging.) An acquaintance of mine, a man in his seventies, once said to me, "The older I get the more I turn to plays rather than novels for my reading pleasure. I think it is for the same reason that every summer I take a canoe trip of two or three hundred miles with my son in Canada for my vacation instead of playing golf. I like strenuous recreation. The reader has to contribute so much out of his own imagination when he reads a play that at the end of a play I feel more energy gone out of me than at the end of a novel. The result is I'm more completely absorbed while I'm at it." The same thing is true in the writing of a play.

(It takes imagination to write a play, a special kind of imagination different from that of the novelist. The author has to carry a great deal in his head that the novelist would be putting down on paper. He is writing half the play and waiting for the theatre to finish it. But he has to know what he wants the theatre to do. The theatre contributes almost everything for which the novelist relies on description. The novelist describes the physical appearance of the characters—the theatre gives the physical presence itself in the actors, their costuming and make-up. The novelist tries to make the reader see what happens in the story as though the action were moving before his eyes, describes the movements of the characters, the changing expressions on their faces, the sound of their voices—all that is embodied in the actors in the

theatre. The novelist describes the setting and the background for the scenes of his story. In *Dead End*, the stage designer puts the dead end of a street of the New York City slums before your eyes; or Catfish Row in *Porgy and Bess*, or in *Winterset*, the gigantic span of a bridge far overhead, dim in the mist of early morning, three tiny red lights gleaming faintly; in the foreground it is still dark under the shadow of the massive bridgehead. The stage designer not only produces the physical structure of the setting, but he creates the atmosphere of the scene, the glare of sunlight, storm, the shadows of dawn. Of course, the writer of a play suggests these things in stage directions, but he can exercise only a very limited art of description in stage directions; they are a kind of shorthand between the dramatist and the people of the theatre.)

— The great thing in writing the first play is to realize that the theatre—which means directors, actors, stage designers, scenery, properties, lighting equipment, the make-up box—is a collaborator. Learn what the theatre has to offer and think of the play in relation to the stage. Like any other collaborator the theatre has its crotchets too. There are things the novelist can do that the dramatist can't do and get along with his co-worker. But even the restrictions of the dramatic form may be utilized to add clarity and force to what the dramatist wants to say—and they add zest to the problem of writing a play. ~

— Drama is the most artificial of the literary forms, the most civilized. A theatre is a social institution and imposes elaborate conventions and rigidities of form and technique.) The question for the person aspiring to write drama is, Will he let the restrictions of form stand in his way, merely as hurdles or obstacles to be overleaped, or can he, by mastering them, make them the servants of his creative impulse? ~ I would sum it up this way: it is easier to write a novel or a poem than a play, but one is much more likely to write a bad novel or poem than a bad play. The elements of form in the novel are so intricate and subtle, and so largely individual, that it is easy to sprawl. The conditions of presentation in a theatre have evolved for the drama a basic fixed

structure which is a good thing in itself; it possesses the esthetically valuable qualities of economy, balance, and harmonious proportions. The novelist or the poet has such variety of form open to him that he has to answer all the questions for himself. When one decides to write a play, a great many problems of how one is going to say what he has to say are settled for him in advance, with the result that the energies are more narrowly channeled, flow with greater force. The formality of drama actually permits greater concentration on content.)

The play, if written for the professional theatre, is going to be of a length that can be presented in two to two and a half hours. If for the amateur theatre, one may not write a longer play, but may write a shorter one, fifteen minutes to an hour. Special principles will have to be studied for each type. The question of length forces selectiveness, and economy is one of the first principles of art. Then the question of scenes imposes further selectiveness. It is a good thing, particularly for the beginning dramatist, to aim at the most standard structure, three acts of one scene each. He must tell his story with the speech and events that might naturally transpire in just three places, in three continuous periods of time approximately balanced in length. If he can manage to use only one place, achieve a one-set play, he has helped himself along materially from the practical theatre point of view. The restriction to three scenes is not a rigid one, of course. With modern theatre mechanics, as under the different conventions of Shakespeare's stage, successful plays have been written with twenty scenes. But even the freest modern stage forms are infinitely restricted in scene compared to the novel—or the motion picture. Three processes are involved: elimination of the unessential, arrangement by which to compress as much significant action as possible into each continuous scene, and suggestion by what is said and done on the stage of a great deal that has happened off-stage. Finally, those events which take place on the stage must not only be adequate to make the story clear, but they must be the crucial moments in the story, the moments in which the characters are confronted by the most vital decisions, in

which their fates are determined, in which there is the highest tension and the greatest release of emotion. Again, the whole procedure works toward unity, proportion, economy, and intensity, assets to any work of art. The theatre is with the author as a collaborator, but his collaborator doesn't solve his problems for him offhand. He makes valuable suggestions, and a lot of discussion is necessary before each point is settled.

The transformation that takes place when a play on paper becomes a play in the theatre is certainly another of the attractions that draw so many people to writing a play rather than a novel or a short story. Perhaps one has had the experience of reading a play, even many times. He has mentally visualized the characters, has been profoundly moved, it seems as though he has experienced the play. Then he sees the play in the theatre, a great actor or actress interprets a part—a Walter Hampden as Cyrano de Bergerac, a Henry Hull as Jeeter Lester, or Katharine Cornell as Juliet—and all that the play has meant from reading pales before the magnitude of the realization in the theatre. That has happened to me many times; it is what I go to the theatre for. And it is one of the things a dramatist writes a play for—that leaping into active, bodily life on the stage of what has existed in his mind.

✓The temperamental author as a nuisance at rehearsals is an old joke of the theatre. But that is the author at rehearsals. If he is unaccustomed to the process of production, a rehearsal in the early, halting, muddling stages can seem more like murder than giving life to his play. For most writers of plays the finished production comes as something of a revelation—the play takes on a vitality and meaning that is somehow a surprise even to the author. It doesn't always take professional or experienced actors to bring a play to life either. Many times I have seen a group of almost totally inexperienced amateurs with a good director, by their sincerity and earnestness, their humility before the job of drawing forth the meaning of the play, give the author seeing his first play produced a thrill that it would be hard for Broadway to beat. ✓

Joseph Conrad once said of his art as a novelist that a writer gives himself to the terrific labor of creating a novel to give tangible form to the faith that is in him. Toward the end of his life he could say, "There are the books," for the meaning of his life. Certainly the novels of Joseph Conrad are an enduring monument. A play is a good deal less likely to survive than a novel—even a bad novel, once it is a book, is hard to burn, almost impossible to give away, and even if you sell it to a second-hand shop, someone will take it home from the ten-cent basket. A great many more plays are produced than are published, and only the printed plays survive to another generation. But a play gives one the feeling of getting into the thick of things. The theatre is a great public forum. If you have something to say and can give it form in a play, and get it produced, it is out before the public at once. The author can sit in the audience and hear himself speaking to them, perhaps more eloquently even than he has dreamed—he can see and hear the reaction of the audience, he is even a part of it himself. Out of his hands the play takes on a life of its own. He may see different productions, different actors in the parts, the interpretation by the same actors varies and grows from night to night, and no two audiences are ever alike. If the play does live through the ages, it will be given new forms and meanings as the ages change. Some people think if Shakespeare could wake up and attend a performance such as the Theatre Guild's *Taming of the Shrew* with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt, or Guthrie McClintic's *Hamlet* with John Gielgud, he'd say, "By Jove, this is something like!"

The person who is drawn to the writing of plays is living in a fortunate time. The history of the theatre tends to go in alternate waves, an actors' theatre and a playwrights' theatre. Today we are in the playwrights' theatre. The search of the New York producers is for more good plays. The production facilities and the actors are available—it is the play which the audience demands.

Fifty or sixty years ago the glamour, the excitement, of the theatre centered on the acting. Several books of reminiscences by veterans of the theatre have appeared in the last

year or so to remind us of that era. William A. Brady in *Showman* tells how in the 70's and 80's every kid in the Bowery who could talk was always spouting, "My kingdom for a horse!" or "Lay on, MacDuff!" and showing how this and that actor got it off. And the same thing was happening from coast to coast, in Kansas City, in Omaha, Denver, San Francisco, in mining towns, in cow towns, in country villages. Those were the days when such plays as *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, and *Hamlet* marched shoulder to shoulder in the repertories of road companies, carrying drama into every community that would be big enough to support a moving-picture house today. Those were the days of bad plays and great acting, the days of Booth and Irving, Jefferson and Mansfield. It was the acting that people got excited about, and the desire to act was in everybody's veins. When I say the plays were bad, I mean, of course, the new plays that were being written. Shakespeare's name was as familiar in the theatre of the latter nineteenth century as that of George S. Kaufman in the theatre of today. But the plays that were written then seem pretty creaky in their mechanics nowadays, and the speeches artificial and bombastic. Like Shakespeare's plays they were full of melodrama and rhetoric, without the poetic genius, or the profound insight into life and human nature. But whether the play was *Way Down East* or *Hamlet*, there were big emotional scenes and rounded-out speeches an actor with the technical training of the old school could get his teeth into.

That was an actor's theatre. Today we have a playwright's theatre. I'm not so old as William Brady, but I started life early enough to catch on to the tail-end, I think, of the theatre he describes. I have seen a few of the younger of the great nineteenth-century actors and actresses in Shakespearean roles. As for the picturesqueness of old-time melodrama, and audience enthusiasm, in a city of my early youth I attended the performances of what must have been one of the last companies of its kind, the Ed C. Nutt Stock Company. They played in a tent, with a new play each week through the year. The tent was heated in the winter with

stoves that had to be stoked during the performance. That was in a southern city, but sometimes one's feet got pretty cold during a winter performance, if he were unlucky enough to be in a corner far from the stove. The Ed C. Nutt Company had full houses every night, for all the hard benches. I saw *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* seriously produced and received there, and *Way Down East* in the moving pictures a year or so ago brought back memories of a too realistic *Way Down East* on that Houston, Texas, stage. Out in the audience, I sat shivering inside my overcoat and wriggling my feet to keep them warm while Anna struggled through the snowstorm on the stage. Those audiences didn't need to be told what to do by the management as in these latter-day revivals like *After Dark* and *The Drunkard*. They spontaneously hissed and booed and wept and cheered. We always knew who the villain was at his first entrance, because he had a big black mustache—like Groucho Marx's. My fondest memory of the Ed C. Nutt Stock Company is the announcement of the play for the following week delivered by Mr. Nutt himself from before the curtain between the last two acts. Whatever the play, he always concluded: "Our offering for next week, ladies and gentlemen, is universal in its appeal; it will please the taste of all, and offend the taste of none. I promise you gripping drama, a thrilling romance, good clean fun, and a fine moral lesson."

The drama of William Brady's youth was on its last legs when I commenced to attend the theatre, and there followed a period that looked like decline. Then a few years ago people began sending in diagnoses of the illness of the American theatre to the New York *Times* drama columns, *Stage*, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, and so on. One can still read every week or so what is the matter with our theatre—the movies, commercialism, the loss of poetry from the stage, the lack of serious social purpose—one can take his choice. All this is most encouraging. So much agitation about the theatre shows it is a going concern. At the same time a new note is entering. Challenging voices are heard to assert the distinction and vitality of our theatre. Regardless of mammon, Hollywood, and frivolity, there has actually been produced

in New York in the last ten years a wealth of drama which constitutes already one of the peaks in dramatic history, second only, perhaps, to the theatre of Greece in the fifth century, B.C., and that of Shakespeare. No Sophocles and no Shakespeare has appeared, but in variety, openness to experiment in form, and freedom of content, it is an exciting theatre for the audience and a welcoming one for the new dramatist.

Off Broadway, the death of the road-show has been lamented. In the last few years, partly because of a depression box-office in New York and partly because of the love for the theatre and broader audiences of such people as Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, and Madame Nazimova, an increasing number of road companies have been going on tour. But whether the road-show ever regains its former distribution or not, the so much needed decentralization from Broadway is progressing vigorously in the non-professional and semi-professional theatres. There are approximately seven hundred schools and colleges offering regular dramatic productions, about a hundred of them with well-equipped theatres, and new theatres being built every year. There are well over a thousand non-professional theatres of other types, little theatres, community theatres, and so on, throughout the country, performing in everything from redecorated barns to school auditoriums, and magnificently equipped theatres like the Civic Theatre in Kalamazoo, and the Cleveland and Pasadena Playhouses. A goodly number of these theatres have developed professional standards of production second only to the very best productions in New York. The Federal Theatre and the Labor Stage movements in different ways have brought drama to thousands of audiences who had never seen a stage-play and are creating great new areas of drama consciousness.

The Summer Theatres have grown up in four years to be an important factor in the spread of drama. As against the thirty-odd, nearly all located in New York State or New England, when they first commenced to attract attention, there are over one hundred and thirty in twenty states listed this year in *Stage*. More significant than the increase in

number is a new trend in policy. At first the Summer Theatres aimed at the already theatre-sophisticated summer visitors for audiences. Now they are entering into closer association with the communities in which they take up their abode and are drawing in the local year-around residents as a basic audience. A few miles from where I am writing, the Surrey Players invite the members of granges with their families and friends to come at a reduced price to their openings every Monday as Grange Night. Out of their four plays this summer, *The Good Hope* was selected on the belief that it would interest Maine people with their great maritime and fishing tradition. A recollection from barnstorming up the Hudson in 1922, playing in lodge-halls and granges, is in interesting contrast to the summer of 1938. One night a member of the company was helping a dear old lady into her buggy. When she was seated, she bent down and said, "Good-night, and we all ought to be very thankful to you young people. You've given us something to think about." She had never been outside the little valley in which she was born, and she had just seen her first play. Most of our audiences were seeing their first play. Now there is a well-established Summer Theatre within easy buggy-distance of the old lady's farm, and five in a radius of thirty miles.

When those of us who are now young or in middle years are old we shall be talking of the great period of the theatre we have seen. The veterans of the theatre who started their careers at the height of one national wave of theatre-consciousness are getting in on the rise of another such wave. The big difference is that this is a theatre of drama, the old theatre was a theatre of acting. The play used to be the actor's vehicle, now the actor is the play's interpreter. It is a symbol of the two generations that James O'Neill, the father, was nationally known as an actor, and Eugene O'Neill is a national figure as a dramatist.

People used to see the same play many times for the sake of interpretations by different actors. Shakespeare was essentially an actor's vehicle, and the text was often treated in a pretty cavalier fashion with cutting and alteration to build the star's part. We are getting more Shakespeare again the

last two years and in promise for this year than we have had for a few decades, although no approach to the old days. There is a difference in these new productions, however. Such great actors and actresses as Katharine Cornell, Maurice Evans, John Gielgud, and Leslie Howard have given their best to bring the play that Shakespeare wrote to their audiences rather than to project themselves. And the audiences have loved them because they have proved to have the stature not only for great parts but for great plays. Although Shakespeare was the most successful single commercial dramatist last year, the demand nowadays is primarily for new plays. That of course means we have fewer revivals of classics than we once had. The comparative absence of classics from our stage doesn't worry me much as an indication of the state of our national culture. I should like personally to have more opportunities to see Shakespeare's plays in the theatre; but if the Elizabethans had concentrated on production of old Roman plays by Seneca and Plautus or Terence we should have had no Shakespeare. And it took the production of a great many bad Elizabethan plays to give us a Shakespeare. In other words, there had to be an audience demanding new plays and a theatre doing its best to keep up with the demand, to call forth and support a great new dramatist. The classics of today were the new plays of some earlier period of the theatre like this we are in now—a period of creative energy, a period that wants to speak its mind in the theatre.

A theatre of acting is a theatre of the past. It develops an audience of connoisseurs, but cannot be a part of the surging active life of its own time. Without having visited China, one may have seen a production in a Chinese theatre in San Francisco or Seattle, or in New York before the old opera house in the Bowery which concluded its days as a Chinese theatre was demolished a few years ago. In the Chinese theatre one sees the final stage of a classical theatre the works of which are all perfectly familiar to the audience. The Occidental is astonished at the apparent obliviousness in the audience to what is passing on the stage. Friends chat and regale themselves on ancient pickled eggs, children play un-

heeded up and down the aisles. But if one watches the audience individually instead of *en masse*, at any moment he will see an animated conversation between two cronies break off abruptly. They lean forward intently, they nod and smile with gentle approval or shake their heads in gentle deprecation, and resume the conversation. Half an ear or eye has been on the stage until the play came to a favorite passage or a hurdle of especial difficulty for the actor, and then they gave their attention to how the new player would take the part. It is not a question of how the actor will interpret the part; that, also, long ago was fixed. It is now purely a matter of his elocutionary skill and the grace and precision of his movements, the accuracy with which by arduous training he has become the instrument of a tradition.

In England today, where people are closer to the might of Shakespeare than we are, and have an intimate national pride in his genius, he has spread his wings a little too heavily over the modern theatre. The profounder national voice has been left too often to speak through his competence, and the contemporary drama has remained in a more superficial relation to the lives of its audience than in this country. The rattle of the tea-tray during an afternoon performance in an English theatre does remind one of the pickled-egg vendor. The English theatre today is more an actors' and less the dramatists' theatre than ours.

A vigorous new drama does not mean a neglect of the past, it brings the past into more vital relation with the present. People become interested in the interpretation instead of the rendering of the classics, they want to know what the great minds of the past had to say, what they have to say to our own problems and experience. It is the presence of such dramatists as Eugene O'Neill, Sidney Howard, and Maxwell Anderson that has called Shakespeare and Ibsen back into our theatre in recent years. And it is in a dramatists' theatre that producers, directors, and actors give new interpretations and applications to the older dramatists.

Those who write significant new plays must themselves be scholars in the history of drama and the theatre. This is especially true for us because this modern theatre which we

think of as experimental, striking out new paths in form and content, is peculiarly an historical theatre. The physical aspects of the stage and the social character of the audience create the conventions and mold the form of each drama. The development of modern stage mechanics and lighting in our era of invention has given us a flexible theatre adapted to many forms as no theatre of the past has been, and we have a more diversified audience to welcome variety. Modern scientific historical scholarship has made available knowledge of the conventions of the Greek, the Roman, the Oriental, the medieval, the Renaissance theatres. Modern experiments, the use of masks, of choruses, of soliloquies, of a flowing action through sixteen or twenty scenes, are revivals of old conventions fused into new forms and adapted to new meanings. Influences from moving picture and radio technique join hands with influences from the Theatre of Dionysus and Shakespeare's Globe on the contemporary stage.

Without their familiarity with the Greek chorus the young poet-dramatists William Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Archibald MacLeish would not have made the use they have of the radio announcer. Barrett Clark quotes Eugene O'Neill as saying of his preparation for a career as dramatist: "I read about everything I could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans—practically all the classics and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg." There is no way to learn the foundation of any art except from the works of predecessors, but this is especially true for drama in the modern American theatre. An actor's theatre may use crude plays like those of earlier American drama, or easy formula plays neatly patterned like so many in the theatres of London and Paris today. The aspirant to the new American theatre must have a grounding in technical competence and must be prepared out of fulness of background to contribute something to the freshness and variety that a vigorous audience demands.

The most encouraging aspect of the national non-professional theatre movement as it is expressing itself in the past few years is the development of creative audiences. In New York the excitement of the theatre centers in the new play.

The audience goes for the stimulus to its own critical faculties and independent judgments, and by its response helps in the creation of the play. It is a part of the theatre. The audience in the non-professional theatres have been timid; they could be attracted only by the revival of a classic or a play with the official stamp of Broadway success. Perhaps with meagre opportunities for theatre, they wanted to be sure of getting their money's worth. This is changing. The audiences in the provincial theatres, as they are called in New York, are beginning not only to want the experience of new plays, their own premières, but of plays written in and of their own region. They are beginning to realize that New York City is a province to them, that is, a locality with its own unifying character and interests, its limitations. Sophisticated and diversified in its tastes as the Broadway audience is, plays as good as those that succeed may fail there because they happen not to jibe with the audiences' local range of interest or their mood of the month. Some of those very plays may be closer to some provincial audience than many that succeed. But Broadway was the test, and those plays passed into oblivion. Similarly, hundreds of plays were written throughout the country that never saw Broadway, and therefore were never seen at all, which would have been more vitally related to a local audience than half the professionally produced plays.

Twenty years ago Professor George Pierce Baker founded at Harvard University a theatre as a workshop for the creation and production of new plays. A few years later Professor Frederick Koch commenced the establishment of a creative folk theatre at the University of North Carolina. They were the pioneers. From a survey of one hundred of the leading colleges and universities I find that ten years ago, twenty-eight had developed courses in playwriting, and today, sixty-seven have such courses. Of the sixty-seven, fifty-four have theatres in which one or more new plays are produced each year. At least thirty theatre organizations, in the colleges and out, give special attention and encouragement to new plays, and the ambition to give a first production is spreading to hundreds of others. Within a few

months' time the directors of three of the best-known theatres in the country have inquired of me about plays from among my students for production. Each has said the same thing: he has tried new plays before, but the audience was wary of them; now, he believes the interest is there. One of the three is preparing to encourage local playwriting with his community playhouse as a try-out laboratory. The Workers' Theatres have inevitably produced new plays because they demanded a new kind of material, and the federal theatres have given preference to new writers, especially local writers. The Federal Play Bureau has been reading plays at the rate of around seven thousand a year, and publishing selected lists with synopses and description for their local theatres. These lists have also been available to educational and other non-commercial theatres.

Broadway is the supreme goal in the heart of everyone who writes a play. Broadway at its highest levels may justifiably be considered the final mark of merit. For all the cynical opinions that everything but merit determines the selection of plays in the commercial theatre, it is probable that the best plays that achieve professional production are the best plays that are being written in this country. And the beginning dramatist may rest assured that any play that is selected for New York production at all, in the light of his own efforts, has something to commend it. But the commercial theatre is a very limited field. Out of the forty thousand plays submitted in a year, around a hundred and fifteen or a hundred and twenty will be produced. About eighty of those will lose money and close early. Perhaps twenty will break even, and ten to fifteen will make some money. Four, five, or six will be smash hits and make a tremendous amount of money. New York is only the apex of a national theatre. Fortunately, the base is broadening.

Writing plays does not yet offer a career by which to make a living. The Broadway gamble is for three kinds of person: one who has a private income, one who has a job and writes plays out of hours, and the young person who has such an urge to drama in him that he looks at the figures and goes ahead anyway even if he half starves on the

way. I have known some of the latter kind, and there is a chance that that kind of urge means a future dramatist and will ultimately land the aspirant on Broadway. I am willing to tell such a person whether I think his plays are good or bad, but I would never take the responsibility of advising him not to look for a job.

The professional theatre world, realizing its own need, is making efforts to build roads for talented young dramatists to the theatre as a career. The Bureau of New Plays, organized and directed by Miss Theresa Helburn of the Theatre Guild, led the way with scholarships and professional guidance in the spring of 1936. In the spring of 1937 the first American Theatre Conference was held in New York, in which representatives from all the branches of the professional theatre, and from the subsidiary theatre, or school and community theatres, came together. The need of more scholarships for young dramatists was a much-discussed topic, and the John Golden Fellowships offered through the Dramatists' Guild resulted. Since then playwriting scholarships have been created by the Rockefeller Foundation, and several projects for giving young dramatists instructive association with the professional theatre and try-outs of their plays are underway.

The hope of drama as a professional career, however, lies in the decentralization of the theatre, the growth of the independence of the approved-by-Broadway stamp which is beginning to appear in theatres throughout the country. The Dramatists' Play Service has been organized by Barrett Clark to encourage and utilize this trend. Selected plays are offered through the Play Service at a \$50 royalty to approved theatres. Twenty such productions mean a living return on the dramatist's work if his play never sees Broadway. The Federal Theatre has opened up similar opportunity. Such organization is a real step toward a national drama.

The first concern of the beginning dramatist, however, should be not remuneration but production for the sheer joy—and agony—of it. His play will be given life, he will speak to an audience and they to him, he will become part of the theatre and of the audience-community in creative

activity—and he will see the many things he has done he should not have done, and the much undone he should have done. He will immediately want to write another and better play. Wherever he is, he should look for any possibility of production. If there is no amateur or semi-amateur group available, perhaps he may be the one to initiate a theatre in his community. Let the theatres of amateur acting be wholly creative, and theatres of amateur plays as well. Lady Gregory and Yeats and Synge were amateur dramatists when they wrote the plays that first brought fame to the Abbey Theatre of Dublin and that are now classics of modern drama. They wrote them because a group of people had decided they wanted an Irish drama in Ireland, and the professional Irish dramatists were all busy writing England's drama. There is great pleasure and satisfaction to be found in being an amateur dramatist all one's life.

Amateurism and dilettantism must not be confused. The amateur is one who goes in for something to the limit for the love of the thing itself. Anyone who is going to tackle writing a play should be prepared for an arduous job. He must be prepared for intensive study of the history of drama, technique, the theatre; for intensive thinking, for intensive self-criticism and rewriting. He will have to learn how other dramatists have done their job, and then find within himself a way that is his own. If a book or course in playwriting can help, it will be as concentrated experience. That is what all teaching is, a head-start on experience. There is no secret formula for writing a good play, but the selection and organization of material which is available to all may sensitize the student, so to speak, to experience, so that perceptions come in months which might have taken years. No study and no effort can make a dramatist if there is not the unanalyzable something within, which finds its proper release in the form and voice of drama. However, from my experience as a teacher of playwriting, I would say that, however rare the potential Broadway dramatist may be, infinitely more people than others suspect or than would suspect it for themselves, have a play within them for which the authors and their own community life would be the

richer. Finally, the person who tries a play and carries the job through to a finish, and then decides writing plays is not for him, will have stretched the limbs of his mind and imagination, will have become more alert and analytical in his responses to life about him, and will enjoy drama in reading and in the theatre the more for the remainder of his life.

II. WHAT A PLAY IS

FIRST of all, a play is a story. It is the business of a drama, like any other work of fiction, to tell a story, that is, it must have a plot. There have been some dramatists in recent years who profess scorn of anything so childish as a plot. They are writing for psychological analysis or to express ideas. Character and theme are more exalted topics than plot, the mere mechanics of the play. The plot is a vehicle for projection of the substance of the play to the audience, but what good is the doctor on an emergency call if the car doesn't run? Whatever the dramatist says he was interested in, if his play was successful it pretty certainly had a passably good plot. Let the name of Aristotle restore dignity to the battered subject. In his *Poetics* over twenty-two hundred years ago he wrote: "The Plot . . . is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of the tragedy." He makes it clear that there is no good drama without proper development of Character, Thought, and Diction, but without the plot there can be no drama at all. Aristotle also remarks that "novices in the art are able to elaborate their diction and ethical portraiture, before they can frame the incidents." In other words, the first problem of content is to find a good story, and the first problem of technique is construction.

The attraction of a story is something so fundamental in human nature that it will not do to fail of proper respect. Sir Philip Sidney in his sixteenth-century *Defense of Poesy* phrased the universal love of a story with the charm characteristic of his writing. The term poetry at that time was applied to all fictional literature whether in verse or prose. Sir Philip wrote of the poet, "with a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you, with a tale that holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner." And so a tale, to this day, bodied forth on a public stage, in a theatre, will draw

us on a wintry night from our comfortable chair by the fireside, from the game of bridge, from the conversation of our friends—unless our friend also has a very, very good tale to tell.

But it is not just any story that so draws us, but a particular kind of story. Any series of events, one following upon another, is a story—what Sir Philip Sidney had in mind was a dramatic story, that is, a plot. A plot is a series of events of a kind and so arranged as to arrest our attention and hold our interest by creating and maintaining suspense. What is necessary to creation of suspense is a conflict, an opposition between two forces, with the outcome uncertain. If it is to be a good conflict, it must be between forces that are well-matched, but not equal. If they are equal we have a deadlock, and no story. A story must move. If one force is immediately and obviously stronger than the other, there is no suspense as to the outcome—and anyway it would all be over very shortly and again we would have no story. We want a conflict like a good tug-of-war, in which two sides strain against each other, swaying now one way, now the other, until finally there comes the decisive lead and victory for one, defeat for the other. So a well-drawn conflict is the first essential to drama.

The content of any play if reduced to the barest outline becomes a statement of conflict. In Sophocles' *Antigone* the domestic piety and sisterly affection of Antigone comes into conflict with Creon and the authority of the state. *Men in White*, by Sidney Kingsley, a play of the medical profession, presents a brilliant young interne torn between loyalty to his profession and loyalty to the woman he loves. The situation in *The Green Bay Tree* by Mordaunt Sharp involves Dulcimer, a fanatic for beauty, and Owen, a fanatic for morality, and in between two essentially normal young people; against this double force the young people struggle to realize love and normal existence. Eugene O'Neill's *Days Without End* presents by the device of two figures on the stage, one wearing a mask, the conflict between two aspects of one man's inner life, his spiritual, faith-seeking impulses, and his rational, cynical, faith-denying impulses. In *Father*

Malachy's Miracle the gentle father tries to do people good directly by simple faith, astonishingly enough with a bona fide miracle, and finds that a miracle is not wanted in the world today, not even by his Church. Random selection of examples will lead to the same end.

Any simple conflict will not do for the making of a good play. The source of the conflict must contain enough complications to keep the story going, to keep up suspense. A new element that enters the situation after the story starts and effects which way the conflict will go is a complication. A tug-of-war that is determined purely by brute strength is too simple a conflict to be truly dramatic, for it might be exerted in a single direction, without variety of application, without any new situation to be met. Now if, as one side is being pulled toward the other, the leader comes to a good stone solidly implanted in the earth and by bracing his feet against it he checks the course of defeat, and gives the men on his side time to recover their wind, that is a complication. If the little fellow on the tail end with a lot of loose rope dangling comes abreast of a small tree and, unseen by his opponents, gets a hitch of the rope around the tree, that is a complication. In a play, *Dinner at Eight* by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, a ruined lobster aspic, a butler with patches on his face from a fight with the chauffeur over the maid, a message at the last minute that the guest of honor has been called to Florida on business (he really went on a fishing trip) are complications in the struggle of a woman to achieve a dinner party. It is by building the course of the conflict upon a series of complications that the playwright maintains suspense, and makes a simple conflict a drama. One of the greatest difficulties for the beginning dramatist, I have found, is in creating enough complications—the play tends to move in too direct a line to its outcome. Fertility of imagination for the invention of complications is one of the marks of a future dramatist. Anyone who analyzes the plays which have bored him in the theatre will find that in one or another of them the trouble is lack of sufficient complications to keep the story in lively action, turning its direction often enough to maintain suspense.

Dramatic technique is simply the formulation of principles of structure from what has been observed in audience reaction.

In the conflict must be found the first principle of a drama, its unity. A dramatic story is not just a sequence of events, as we speak of the story of a man's life, or the story of the automobile industry, or the story of medicine, although any of those stories may contain dramas. The unity of a drama is, as Aristotle says, the unity of an action. It cannot be the unity of anything else, of a life, of a subject, of a place, or of a period. Those are biographical and historical unities. Aristotle sums the matter up: "Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero. For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life, which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action." Further, a story constructed on dramatic principles "differs from the ordinary histories, which of necessity present not a single action, but a single period and all that happened within that one period to one person or to many, little connected together as the events may be. For as the sea-fight at Salamis and the battle with the Carthaginians in Sicily took place at the same time, but did not tend to one result, so in the sequence of events, one thing sometimes follows another, and yet the two may not work up to any common end."

We now have a unified conflict as the basis of drama. That sounds simple but it has several implications. First, the conflict must not be prearranged, as a football game or a prize-fight. The conflict must arise before the audience on the stage. When the curtain goes up there is no conflict on the stage. People and a situation are presented to us. In the combination of the natures of those people and the relations in which the situation places them there is the potentiality of conflict. The quicker the dramatist makes that evident the better. It is the possibility of a conflict that arrests our attention and makes us sit waiting patiently in the expectation that something will happen. There is an old saying that there is only one thing an Irishman loves

better than to fight, and that is to see a good fight. I once passed a group of small boys on the street. In their midst was a young friend of mine named Jimmie O'Hara and another boy a bit larger engaged in a fight. At a moment when Jimmie happened to be underneath (there had been complications and uncertainty as to outcome, but at the moment the larger boy was on top), a fight got under way between two of the other boys a few yards from Jimmie's nose. Jimmie squirmed over onto his face, rested his chin on his hands, and ignoring the pummeling he was getting, settled down to complete absorption in the other fight. People are all pretty much Irish in this respect. They dismiss their personal struggles from their minds to become absorbed in the presentation of struggle on the stage.

The dramatist has arrested attention with the potentiality of conflict. Then comes the initial complication—something happens, some new element enters the scene which precipitates the conflict. But for the highest degree of interest, the conflict must have been inherent in the characters and the situation—must arise from what was before us on the stage. In Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the play opens with Christine Mannon, her husband away at war, in love with another man, Adam Brant. There is Lavinia, the daughter, jealously devoted to her father, and Orin, the son, with a similar jealous love for his mother—the elements of conflict are present. Ezra Mannon returns home and there is the necessary complication. Now we are held by the question of outcome, how will the conflict end?

Secondly, the conflict must run its course and come to a conclusion. The question that arose at the beginning, and concerning which suspense is maintained, must be answered, the audience brought to a state of rest, of satisfaction, in regard to it. Not that there should be no question or questions in our minds when the curtain goes down. The very resolution of the conflict may be of such a nature as to create a new question. If so, that question may offer the material for another drama, but one play has come to an end when the major dramatic question has been answered. A comedy may be based on the simplest and one of the oldest of all

themes—"The course of true love never runs smooth." Suspense was created and sustained on the question, "Will Henry overcome all obstacles and win Elizabeth to be his bride?" and the play ends properly when Henry and Elizabeth are married, or certainly are going to be. Perhaps by that time the audience have observed this and that about Henry and Elizabeth that suggests matrimony as a stormy sea rather than a haven for their frail bark of love—but that is another story. When Nora closes the door behind her at the end of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the action is decisive: she has left her husband to seek self-realization as an individual. Some day she and Helmar may be reunited, but how that came about would be material for another play.

In the third place, in a unified conflict, the course of action and the outcome should develop causally from the initial situation. The outcome should not be the result of accident or chance, or of the action of a new character brought into the play at the last moment. For example, in so complicated an action as that of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, the outcome can be traced back step by step to the initial circumstance that Nina Leeds' fiancé was killed in the war. There are some apparent exceptions to this principle—the conflict may be between the individual and Fate, which may be conceived of as the element of chance in life; but Fate is then present as a finally determining force throughout the drama. Similarly, in some of the ancient Greek tragedies the outcome was determined by the act of a god who enters just at the end of the tragedy; but again, the divine power was present throughout the course of the action, and the outcome was determined by whether or not the conduct of the characters throughout had been in accord with the divine will. The entire action of a modern play, *Grand Hotel*, is based on the chance grouping of people in a hotel, with the attitude, Life is like that. What is accidental may be amusing or exciting, or painful or pathetic, but is not dramatic unless it is felt as the action of a force against which the victim can struggle.

Aristotle's often-quoted statement, "A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and end," sounds obvious and not very useful. As expanded, it is full of meaning: "A begin-

ning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity or in the regular course of events, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to the type here described."

Aristotle's views on the possible ways in which a drama might successfully be developed were limited by the theatre which he knew and the social responses of his time and place. As in so many fields of thought, however, the foundation laid by him seems to be for all time. The fundamentals of what constitutes a drama can nearly all be found succinctly stated in the *Poetics*. Rereading the *Poetics* at any time will set one's feet on the ground of first principles.

We have the material for drama, then, when forces and conditions have converged in someone's life to a point where that person's will and some other force are in conflict. He is either going to suffer defeat on the spot or he is going to exercise his will and all his faculties to gain his desire against some clearly defined opposing force, whether another individual, social pressure, or fatality of circumstance—possibly even some conflicting desire or weakness within himself. In other words, there is the beginning of a drama when action is inescapable. The character either has to shove or be shoved. A man trying to get out of a New York subway car downtown around the five o'clock rush hour, when all of downtown is jamming to get in, embodies the idea. When he reaches the door of the car he has to decide upon concentrated action in the direction he wants to go or he will be hurled back in the direction he doesn't want to go. He may be hurled back anyway several times before he successfully breasts the crowd, and may, for all his efforts, find himself on the wrong side when the doors shut. Whether he is inside or out, when the doors close, that is the end of the drama: the conflict has come to its final resolution one way or another.

Of course the subway struggle is too simple to more than

suggest a dramatic movement, and it lacks, as stated, one of the essential elements, what is usually called the crisis, the supreme turning point in the play. In a good play the action does not progress in a single straight line of alternating advances and setbacks toward the outcome, but the course of the action leads to some new and unforeseen situation which demands a final and determining decision and act of will. Our simple subway action could come to such a crisis. Our protagonist is still inside and the doors are closing. He gets his hands between the doors and holds them apart. The train is moving. He can shove them open and leap for the platform. The question now is, not will he get out or be carried on to the next stop; he can get out, but will he land safely on the platform or will he be killed? He decides to make the leap, and what happens to him after that is the resolution of the play.

With a unified conflict we have the material of suspense. Sustaining the suspense is a matter of the complications and how they are handled. The necessity of a sufficient number of complications has already been mentioned, but a wealth and variety of complications may fail to hold attention. It is necessary that there be a climactic rhythm of intensity. As said before, the structure of drama is something that has evolved in response to audience reaction. There are two basic psychological principles of attention—it is easily wearied, and easily cloyed. The attention cannot be held at a continuous tension for a long period. That is one of the reasons that a drama requires numerous complications—to break up the continuous main suspense of the play into a series of minor situations of suspense. Each complication creates a new question, which rises to its peak of intensity, and is answered. The answer in each case bears on the outcome of the major dramatic question, and sometimes is itself a new complication creating a new question. But there has been a moment of rest after a high point of tension. The drama progresses, then, rhythmically, with rising and falling intensity.

Dinner at Eight has been mentioned, and the complications attendant upon a dinner party. Each of those complications, a ruined lobster aspic, a battered butler, a disappear-

ing guest of honor, reaches its peak and is solved, the lobster aspic by crab Newburg, and so on. The question of the dinner party itself comes to a peak of tension with the lady-of-the-house driven into a tantrum by her difficulties. But the dinner party finally is going on, and that complication is settled. However, the hostess, as a result, is so distracted that she fails to see that her daughter is confronted by a serious problem when she comes to her for help, and similarly she disregards her husband, the character of chief interest. Crucial events are entering the household, and the comedy of the dinner party becomes the determining factor in the lives of its members.

The second psychological principle is that the attention is easily cloyed. As has been stated, attention wearies and demands fresh impression to be sustained. In addition, the change must always be a progression to a higher intensity. Everyone knows from experience that if the eyes are concentrated for a time upon vivid colors and then shifted quickly to colors of less intensity, the latter appear weak and uninteresting, of lower color value than normally. In the old Memorial Hall at Harvard University there is a fine modern rose window in the north transept, and a rose window in the south transept of medieval stained glass brought to this country from Italy. If you go in by the south entrance so that your gaze falls first on the modern window, you will pause entranced by its brilliance; then walk across the transept and turn and look for a time at the medieval window. The intensity of its ruby, almost purple blue, and topaz will hold you spellbound. Turn again and look at the north window. You can hardly believe it is the same window you admired a few moments before, so pale and weak do its colors appear. In the proper order from the less intense to the more intense sensation, there is a sequence of pleasure. When looking at the richer window one does not remember the first window with disfavor; each has its place in a sustained experience. But when the order is inverted the observer turns from the window of less brilliant color with a feeling of frustration.

Exactly the same principle applies to the response to successive situations in a drama. The situations must follow one

another in a rising order of intensity. In other words, the rhythm of intensity of the complications must be climactic to be successful; as each complication rises and falls, giving place to the next in sequence, each must rise higher than the preceding, until finally the peak of intensity of the entire drama is reached, the point which we call the crisis. The crisis is the turning point in the movement of the drama. Up to this point there has been more or less of an alternation between complications tending toward the one solution of the play and the other. At the crisis the accumulation of those complications tending in one direction has gained such momentum that with one more determining complication they become irresistible, and the play moves swiftly in the direction of the final answer to the major dramatic question. In tragedy the crisis is usually the point from which the fortunes of the hero descend. In comedy the process of tangling up a situation proceeds to the crisis, the point of greatest entanglement; from that point the process is one of clearing up the confusion and bringing about the happy ending.

Now we might finally define a good plot for drama as "a unified conflict involving sufficient complications for a climactic rhythm of intensity." In other words, the action of a good drama is a wave movement. We sit on the seashore, or the lakeshore, and watch the waves coming in. A little wave starts far out; we see it rise to a peak and subside, run in again, rise a little higher, in a little farther, and subside; again higher, farther, it subsides. Finally, the wave rushes in to a great crest and breaks on the shore. There is dramatic unity and movement. I feel pretty certain that part of the reason people are so universally fascinated by just sitting and watching the sea is that the movement of the waves meets those basic principles of attention. It is rhythmic, it is climactic.

So much has been said about the element of suspense in drama that it is possible a good drama plot has been made to sound like that of an O. Henry short story. Suspense suggests uncertainty, and surprise, then, in the outcome. That is the formula of the O. Henry short story. The whole course of the story builds up great curiosity as to how it is

going to come out. Two or more possibilities are made evident but so nicely balanced against each other that the reader is bewildered, now inclining to one expectation, then another. The ending comes—different from anything anticipated, a complete surprise. On looking back, we can see how it has been logically prepared for, but the steps were concealed, our attention diverted to other expectations. We have come to speak of the O. Henry trick endings.

Actually, this kind of suspense belongs only to the lower order of drama. It is what we find in the mystery melodrama, like *The Bat*, *The Cat and the Canary*, *The Thirteenth Chair*. We often hear tragedy called the highest type of drama, and we hear it said that the outcome in tragedy must be inevitable, and the tragedy must have such unity of mood from the beginning that actually we would feel the fitness of things had been violated, and our expectation too stringently defeated if a happy ending were to be brought about. The truth of this was interestingly illustrated in the case of a play called *Exceeding Small* by Caroline Francke a few years ago. The play was drawing light houses the first two weeks—the critics praised it, but the public increasingly stayed away. The play was a tragedy, one of the fine American plays of recent years. But not everyone can take tragedy; it was evident that the play was failing because it depressed the audiences; the tragedy seemed too bitter, and it was too close to home—about young people of the poorer class in New York. Miss Francke was asked to give it a happy ending. The play took rather curiously little revision to achieve the new ending. The circumstances were already there by which the happy ending was possible. But the play was even less successful than before. Although the happy ending was possible, the mood was violated. After a week of happy ending the original ending was restored.

We may, then, in a play, anticipate the outcome in its general outline, the catastrophe in tragedy, the final union of the lovers in a romance, and so on—and yet have suspense. Of course, there is still the uncertainty as to just how the outcome is to be brought about. But that is not the basis of suspense in the best drama. There is a higher kind of

suspense than that of mere curiosity, a suspense closer to the emotions—we may know how the play is coming out in its general outline, we may even have seen the play before and know the details—still we may sit gripping the arms of our seats. The events which we foresee are going to happen before our eyes. Imagine yourself on a street corner. You see a car coming at a high rate of speed from one side of the intersection, and a car coming at a high rate of speed from another side. It is a blind corner—you realize that neither driver can see the other car in time to avert a collision. Disaster is inevitable. There is nothing you can do. You stand rooted to the spot, waiting for the crash. There is no lack of suspense or tension. So in witnessing a great tragedy on the stage, we are detached onlookers before whom great events are passing—human fates hang in the balance—we foresee the catastrophe as inevitable. But we wait in awed suspense. In comedy we may await a foreseeable outcome in delighted anticipation.

This higher type of suspense, which engages emotions more profound than that of curiosity, depends, of course, upon drama that has not only good plot, but good character portrayal. Our higher emotions are stirred by contemplation not of external events, but of how men react to those events. When the audience foresees in Sophocles' great drama that Oedipus himself is the man he is seeking upon whom justice must be done, and the question becomes, What will Oedipus do when he discovers that in ignorance he has committed the terrible crimes of killing his father and marrying his mother, the tension increases.

The inexperienced writer, in searching about for material for drama, often confuses what is interesting, or picturesque, or exciting with what is dramatic, just as the merely painful is often confused with the particular dramatic effect of the tragic. A newspaper reporter assigned to a train wreck for a color story is liable to use such phrases as "the scene of the grim tragedy," "the tragic drama of death and horror," and so on. While the train wreck may release individually tragic actions, the event in itself is not tragic in the technical sense for drama. The catastrophe comes as an accident without

sustained conflict and struggle and play for human will. One often hears someone exclaim of a person who is unusual and interesting, a play ought to be written about that person. But a person may be interesting or picturesque to any degree without being suggestive of drama. It is the potentiality of conflict that is necessary if the character is to be a good starting point for a play. Think for a moment of Harpo Marx and Charlie Chaplin as seen on the stage or in moving pictures. They are both interesting and unusual, but one fits into drama and the other does not. Harpo's shows are of the revue or musical comedy type with almost no plot. Harpo always acts upon impulse, from hitting the man he doesn't like to immediate pursuit of the woman he does like. But it is the impulse of the moment toward the object of the moment. If frustrated, his attention is immediately caught by a new object, and no sustained conflict develops. But when Charlie Chaplin ambles into the picture we see eyes that are sad, but prepared to become alight and eager. He is an idealist—he has been disappointed many times, but he will always find a new object to which to aspire, something beyond his grasp. He will strive, he will meet with rebuff, but his spirit will remain the same. He will continue to strive until he has gained or lost the end of his desire. He is a dramatic—more often than not, a tragic—figure.

Where there is conflict there is the material of drama. Then the imaginative perception of someone penetrates to the origin of the conflict, discovers its principle of unity, and disentangles from the welter of circumstances the thread of its progression. With all the powers of his intellect and imagination he conceives the characters, the words, and the events that will embody the significance of the conflict, and orders the material according to the laws of attention in the theatre—and there is a play.

III. FINDING DRAMATIC MATERIAL

WHEN one knows what a drama is, the next question is, where to find it. Next door, or in the kitchen, or in the parlor. One does not need to go far afield; it is better not to. Nor does one need to have known unusual people, exciting events, or a picturesque background. Wherever there is human life there is drama. That is, there is the material of drama; it is the alert eye and ear, the insight, the organizing mind—and the knowledge and practice of technique—that makes a drama of it. Write of what is familiar, of what one knows. As Lennox Robinson, director of the Abbey Theatre, wrote in the introduction for one of the books of *University of Michigan Plays*, of the time twenty-eight years ago when the Abbey Players first came to America: "And then young American dramatists began to learn from our dramatists how to write real American plays. They learned not to be afraid to write about poor people; not to be afraid of accent and dialect; learned that the materials of the American play were the sticks and stones lying outside the American door. They realized that the Negro was part of their subject matter, or life in the Kentucky hills, or in some cottage by the sea, or in a tenement in New York or Chicago." As Mr. Robinson also wrote of the Abbey Theatre, the young American dramatists learned "how very humbly we had begun, how we owed our existence to the enthusiasm and hard unselfish work of a few people who passionately wanted something on the stage which the theatre of commerce did not give them." Since that time, the theatre of commerce has been vitalized by the "sticks and stones lying outside the American door." The accomplishment in the little theatre in Dublin remains an incentive to people everywhere who want drama in their own community and of themselves.

Professor Frederick Koch, founder of The Carolina Playmakers, wrote in the introduction to the first book of *Carolina Folk-Plays*: "The stories and characters are drawn by the writers from their own tradition, and from their observation of the lives of their own people. They are wholly native—simple plays of the locality, of common experience and of common interest. . . . They were written by sons and daughters of Carolina, at Chapel Hill, the seat of the state university. They have been produced with enthusiasm and success by The Carolina Playmakers in their own town and in many towns all over the state." North Carolina, by the setting, has provided a folk drama. The principle of vitality is using the material at hand. A characteristic of the University of Michigan, with students from every state in the United States and many foreign countries, is cosmopolitanism. In the books of Michigan plays the backgrounds include Michigan small towns and farms, also Chicago slums and a New York drawing room, Negro folk-life in the South, a look-out station in the forest service in California, and a pension in Switzerland. Each was written by a student who knew the background intimately and could present it with the ring of truth and sincerity.

There is no better impulse to the writing of a play than the feeling of knowing someone, or a group or kind of people, in a special way, of knowing them in the sense of understanding what they experience or the significance and meaning of their lives, and wanting to make others understand. Then the play will truly be self-expression and communication. What one knows and others do not know may seem very limited and commonplace; it is the insight and interpretation that give significance and breadth. As Thomas Hardy wrote of the boundaries which he deliberately chose for his novels, he decided there was enough human nature in Wessex for one author and one lifetime; and as Professor Koch wrote of the Carolina Plays, "We know that if we speak for the human nature in our own neighborhood we shall be expressing for all."

I can think of no one-act play more simple in its material and treatment than *Joint Owners in Spain* by Alice Brown.

Two old women in an old ladies' home are roommates. They are discontented and each is always complaining of the other. Each wants to change roommates, but no one else wants to put up with either of the famous bickerers. In the resolution of the play, a chalk line is drawn across the middle of the room, and one side of the line is understood to be the house of one, the other side the house of the other. They communicate only by knocking on an imaginary door and formally applying and being formally received as for a social call. In the interims each rocks contentedly in her own chair on her own side of the line. They become sweet-tempered and fast friends. Commonplace, but for how many people does the simple story strike a chord of experience! One of the fundamental truths of human nature is there, the need for everyone of individuality, expanded into possessions or activities and protected from intrusion.

Whether the ultimate interest is in the one-act or the long play form, the writer undertaking a first play will usually do well to begin with a one-act. It is a small workable unit for initiation into the elements of dramatic technique and dialogue as a medium. The whole play can be carried in the head, and the first draft perhaps written at a sitting. There is enough to think about at the start with the simplest construction. For the same reason there is a great deal to be said for a realistic play in traditional form at the start. Fantasy, symbolism, expressionism, all have their established place, and new undefined forms are a part of this experimental period, but these are all modes of expression and demand special attention. The first thing to be mastered is construction, which is foundational and in its basis common to all. Eugene O'Neill commenced his career with realistic one-act plays of the sea, a background in which he had lived intimately. It is true that those first plays were mildly experimental in their time, but it must be remembered that Eugene O'Neill was the son of an actor and grew up in close association with the traditional drama. As he said of the course in playwriting at Harvard, "Necessarily, most of what Baker had to teach the beginners about the theatre as a physical medium was old stuff to me." Of his early background

of drama he has been quoted by his friend George Jean Nathan as saying he supposed it was of value to know what he wanted to depart from. As a matter of fact, his plays prove that he knew what he wanted to keep, too, a solid theatrical foundation. That is just the point, successful experiment depends upon a mastery of the established.

Creative activity cannot be too restricted by rules. If the urge to a particular form is strong enough, whatever it is, it should be followed. But make sure that it is strong enough and that it is based on knowledge. Experiment for the sake of difference is not likely to ring true. The new form should be created by new content. If one does not know and has not tried traditional forms he does not know whether they will work or not. It is a good idea for the beginner feeling an impulse toward radical experiment to make an earnest effort to cast his material into established form, and only then, if it won't work, go ahead with the experiment. Another reason for beginning with realism is the cultivation in observation it gives and the practice in dialogue. All unrealistic forms are ways of expressing reality and depend for their illusion upon a foundation of observation. Even poetry, which we think of as an unrealistic form of dialogue, must have the accent, the essential reality, of the speech of the characters if it is to be integrated with drama. Whatever else the beginning dramatist does, he should not attempt poetic drama unless he is already a poet. There is little hope of his learning to write drama and poetry at once.

A question frequently heard is, Where does one find a plot? In the lives of the people one knows, first of all. Probably not ready-made, although, as Aristotle says, there is no reason why some real events should not have that revealing orderliness which is the function of art. Almost always to the incidents of observation must be added the "if" of imagination—if in such a situation such a thing were to happen, what would follow? That is the way a plot starts. Alice Brown may have known two old ladies living in one room where dissensions were solved by a chalk line on the carpet. Far more probably she knew of two old ladies living in one room whose dissensions, when last heard from,

were active. With insight into that fundamental need for a circle of personality, she was able to identify herself imaginatively with the experience of those two old ladies and at the same time to carry with her that analysis which they could not make for themselves. What would happen, she may have thought, *if* in some way here within the single room a circle of personality could be found? That would set the problem to which the chalk line, the self-imposed rules, and playing the game were the answer. Dramatists are eminently practical people, one sees, in matters of human relations, at least for other people.

Drama is the most objective of the literary arts. One of the first requirements of the dramatist is that capacity to project himself into the consciousness of others; only if he knows what his character would feel in a given situation can he know what he would do and say, and the manner of the act and of the speech. The dramatist must, as it were, possess two minds at once, the one of sympathetic identification with his character, and the other of detachment which knows the character better than he knows himself. Shakespeare supremely among men possessed this dramatic imagination, which is the reason so little can be indisputably ascertained of the man Shakespeare from the wealth of his writing. The dramatist may not say with the sonnet-writer, "Look in thy heart and write."

The last thing the young dramatist should do is try to conform to some notion as to what subject or treatment the audience wants. His first plays will probably be for the amateur theatre—or more likely yet, for his own practice in craftsmanship. One of the reasons for the amateur theatre is the intimate relation between author and theatre; the author is part of that theatre and he and the audience are in a position to fight it out together. A little later he may be aiming at the professional theatre. If he begins to listen to the many voices saying, "Broadway wants this and Broadway wants that," he will find himself writing lifeless plays on worn-out subjects. The only way anyone can speculate as to what the Broadway audience wants is by what they have already approved of, and by that time they want some-

thing else. More than anything else from the new writer, Broadway wants freshness—and a good play—a job well done whatever the subject matter. Sam Grisman believed Broadway wanted *Tobacco Road*, Guthrie McClintic believed it wanted *Winterset*; but they both had to prove it before there were many people to agree with them. How many theatre wiseacres would have predicted success simply on a statement of subject matter for four of the top plays of this year?—*Of Mice and Men*, a story of the friendship of two tramps, one of them not bright; *On Borrowed Time*, a story of an old man, his little grandson, and Death (alias Mr. Brink); *Shadow and Substance*, a story of religious conflict between “an austere canon, too practical for belief, and a serving-maid bursting with a mystic faith,” as stated in *Stage*; and *Our Town*, summarized by *Stage* as a “quiet, philosophical exposition of life, love, and death at Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire”—this last without scenery. The authors of three of the four were new to Broadway. Their plays are clear enough evidence that they did not arrive there by study of previous trends, but by having something individual to present and being able to present it well.

It is especially certain that the young Broadway aspirant will only be led into a period of excited but puttering sterility if he fixes his eye on the huge commercial success of such typed plays as *Three Men on a Horse*, *Stage Door*, *You Can’t Take It with You* and *Room Service*. They have to be written or half rewritten in production by old Broadway wheelhorses like George Kaufman and George Abbott. They belong to the business rather than the art of the professional theatre, and the novice can’t compete with the old hand at his own game.

The success of plays like Clifford Odets’ *Awake and Sing* and *Golden Boy* is also deceptive. Neither is by any means a first-rate play in conception, but Odets has a flair for putting a finger accurately on a certain kind of reality and for a picturesque virility of theatre speech which is quite his own. Tracks following his if they keep up with the swaggering length of stride are almost certain to lack the depth of imprint.

To eschew formulas and imitation and write one's own play is the only hope. But it is desirable to know what has been done, or the young writer may find himself working on what he thinks is a brand-new theme treated in most original fashion only to find it is already hackneyed. The thought that comes most easily is most likely to have come to many other minds. One has to accept mental strenuousness to be creative. One play the young dramatist must not write—the play of the young would-be writer in conflict with his environment, an unsympathetic family, lack of money, or an unappreciative public. And substitution for the writer of an aspirant to art in another form, music or painting, is only an evasion. That play has been written many times, *Young Woodley*, *Alien Corn*, a seed of it in *Candida*—and once was almost one too many. It is a temptation, the conflict of the artist is the one the young writer is himself experiencing. But the artist is a very special kind of person: his life is the interpretation of life, and it is the interpretation, not the interpreter nor the process, in which the audience is interested. They are not artists, and it is their life, not that of the artist, they want brought to them. They want the play to come to them like the style of W. H. Hudson as Joseph Conrad characterized it: "His writing was like the grass which the good God made to grow and when it was there you could not tell how it came."

The impulse to write the play of oneself is a sign of weakness or of slackening of the dramatic imagination, and should be sternly suppressed. It is a curious fact that a young person with a high degree of dramatic talent is likely in his first play to base the characters on members of his own family, following the right instinct for what he knows and understands most intimately, but if he includes himself, that character is especially liable to be colorless. The more truly dramatic the talent the more unsuccessful attempt at self-portraiture tends to be, while the young person with the inherent talent often shows startling penetration into mature experience in others. When he himself is mature enough to have lived conflicts of broader contact than that of the artist to be an artist, he may write autobiographically. Shakespeare

probably did so, but any such conflicts were so transformed and disguised by his dramatically objective genius that we cannot recognize them surely as his own.

An undue stress on originality of plot has developed in the modern theatre which is one of the reasons we meet so many plays thinly or badly plotted. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides drew upon the storehouse of Greek epic legend in Homer and his successors for the basis of their plots, keeping the externals of the story while translating its significance into the thought of their own time. Shakespeare and his fellows drew upon whatever collections of narratives, fictional and historical, were available in their time, the accumulated treasures of the story-telling impulse, the *Decameron*, the Roman comedies, Plutarch's *Lives*, England's chronicles, *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*. Shakespeare worked over earlier plays, took plots from contemporary novels, or from ancient sources indiscriminately. In most cases it was simple and naive material which he utilized to the ends of his great drama. The story of King Lear was essentially a fairy-tale with a happy ending until Shakespeare used it for his mightiest tragedy, and the source for *Othello*, in Professor O. J. Campbell's phrase, was a penny-dreadful tale which Shakespeare miraculously transformed. One after another, sources for Shakespeare's plays have been discovered until it is doubtful if he ever invented a plot, and he seems even to have invented few incidents. Nevertheless, he had more sense and invention for plot than any of his fellow dramatists. Someone has said that while any Elizabethan dramatist apparently could write a good scene, only Shakespeare could write a good play. He combined plots, altered, expanded, compressed, added complications, pointed to crises, above all, he utilized plot to release character. Source-hunting has been the traditional butt of the jokes on dry-as-dust scholarship, but to study Shakespeare's sources in correlation with the plays themselves is to enter into the workshop of his mind, and is a course in playwriting in itself.

Shakespeare wrote for a romantic theatre accustomed to exotic settings. He usually did not change the settings of the stories he appropriated, but adapted them in psycho-

logical, social, and ethical development to his own time. Hamlet is still in name the Prince of Denmark when England was tributary to that country, but the complex inner conflict of Shakespeare's Hamlet would have been quite foreign to his predecessor. The recent success of Giraudoux's witty *Amphitryon* 38 shows the process is still possible in our theatre. Monsieur Giraudoux called his play *Amphitryon* 38 because he estimated it was about the thirty-eighth time the story of Jupiter's infatuation with Alkmene, wife of the warrior Amphitryon, has been told on the stage. The fable in his hands and that of its adapter, S. N. Behrman, is entirely up to date.

A more generally applicable method for our modern theatre is to translate an old story into the terms of modern life. That is what O'Neill did with the Greek story of Electra in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. His attempt is not altogether successful, however, because he did not translate fully. He sought in modern psychological concepts and in the New England conscience, it is true, a rational substitute for the Greek religious concept of Fate and the Erinyes, or avenging Furies. But he kept the deeds of violence. Those deeds were a horror in the original story; in the modern world they are bizarre and interfere with significance and dignity. Such loves and hates as those in the Electra story would more characteristically exist in the modern world without such obvious manifestation. The entire drama might enact itself within a household with friends and neighbors unaware.

The most significant problem of substitution in the story of the House of Atreus is at the point of physical violence, and the greatest interest lies in the psychological and ethical implications and results of such restraint. Agamemnon sacrificed the life of his daughter Iphigenia because he believed religiously the sacrifice was necessary to bring fair winds for the Greek fleet to sail against Troy. In the modern world he might ruin his daughter's life by pressing her into a marriage or hindering a marriage for business advantage; or he might thwart her life in relation to a career because of some prejudice. By such an action he might lose the love of his wife, who might come to hate her husband, take a lover,

and wreck her husband's life without his murder. Electra might develop a psychological hindrance to marriage from the experience of her father and mother, and devotion to her father might cause her to hate her mother. She might bring up her younger brother also to idolize his father and hate his mother; and Orestes through identification with his father and the sex-insult from the mother might develop an inferiority feeling which would create an urge to some assertion against the mother. The question is, What would such people do under such circumstances in modern life, and what would the inner consequences be? The Electra story is still open to translation into a modern play.

There is no reason to expend energy running after a horse in the pasture if one can find a good horse in the stall. The great collections, the *Decameron*, the *Heptameron*, the *Canterbury Tales*, or Greek, Roman, Elizabethan, Jacobean, or Restoration plays may still furnish plots by the process of translation for the modern stage. Or an incident in a newspaper, an episode from history, or a story one has heard may be the starting point as well as events directly observed. The dramatist must develop a keen nose for plot suggestions whenever they pass his way. A notebook is almost certain to be helpful. The notebook had better be used for good lines, brief character comments and analyses, themes—even good names for characters, as in Dickens's notebooks.

Dramatization of novels has proved a rich mine for the modern stage, as witness *Dodsworth*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Old Maid*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Tobacco Road*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *On Borrowed Time*. This is a field for the skilled and experienced workman rather than the beginner. In the first place, only the established writer is likely to get the privilege of adapting a modern novel under copyright. In the second place, avowed dramatization of a known novel or short story, in which the problem is that of faithfulness to the original, transfer of background, characters, and theme, and the tone, to the different medium, is more difficult than writing an original play, a problem demanding a fine perception of the functions and techniques of the two art forms.

Biography, too, has contributed the subjects for many suc-

cesses and many failures in recent years—Queen Elizabeth, Mary of Scotland, George Washington, the Brontë sisters, John Keats, Edgar Allan Poe, Napoleon among them. Biographical subjects are entirely open to the beginning dramatist. A period of research, of course, must be added to the usual time for writing a play, and it probably should not be undertaken except when the writer is attracted to the subject by previous familiarity. The biographical play should not be the first or the second play, however; its technical difficulties are similar to and greater than those of adapting a novel.

One may be lucky enough to find a plot almost ready-made. All that is necessary as a starting point is an incident which precipitates conflict, an incident which makes the turning point or crisis of a conflict, or an incident which resolves a conflict. From any of these three points, one no better than another for the start, a plot may be logically evolved—with the capacity for invention or discovery of complications. Logical development does not preclude the introduction of accidental elements; they are unavoidable in life and in drama. In almost every situation in life there is an X, an unknown quantity. When X is determined, we go ahead from there. Logical development in drama means that for each advance in the plot one of the premises is fixed from what has preceded; the other premise is a free-lance, it may be one thing or another. Plots are built by that constant speculation on the "if"—under the given conditions *if* this happened what would follow?

There are, in general, four impulses which lead to a play: interest in a plot, in a character, in a theme, or in a background. The last, outside the historical drama, is a modern development, and a product of sociological interest. It is, therefore, closely associated with interest in a theme. Elmer Rice, for example, in *Street Scene*, by the title suggests what he is trying to do. I would call the play a panoramic miniature. By presenting what goes on in a single small section encompassing three houses of a tenement street, he suggests the life of blocks, or miles, of such streets. But the presentation leads to the theme of assertion of individuality toward

escape from a sordid and leveling background. Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* is similarly a play of background associated with the theme of the crime-breeding effect of boys growing up under city slum conditions. There is an intermediate type of play, inaugurated by *Grand Hotel*, in which a background attracts the author as a fresh field for plot and character material. Occasionally a play takes its rise from a scene, the thought of how effective a stage setting it would make. This, again, is a modern development, a response to the possibilities of modern staging and emphasis on the art of scenic design. However, unless the scene which stirs the imagination stirs it in the direction of plot, as Stevenson said there are houses which demand to be haunted and dank gardens which cry out for a murder, the play is likely to remain more the business of the stage designer than of the dramatist, an effect within the province of musical comedy and revues, but not proper to drama.

The impulse to start from theme is particularly widespread today. The public forum aspect of the theatre is strong. People are thinking actively about social problems, the problem of labor versus capital, of economic oppression; the problem of crime, of what drives people to crime, of the effect of prisons upon their inmates; the problem of discontented wives; the problems of sex, of education, of international relations. Or someone wants to say what he thinks of psychology, of psychiatry, or of religion, or of higher mathematics, and so on endlessly into all the ramifications of our complex social and individual lives. This is a vital impulse for the theatre and should by no means be checked. But starting with theme is the hardest way to achieve a play. When the writer has a beautifully composed expository statement of his theme down on paper he still has none of the actual material of the play, except possibly one speech; and when the play is written, if it is well done, he is likely to find he doesn't need that speech, is better off without it. A theme is a statement of some belief on the part of the author, which he would communicate to others. His play must not argue or expound the theme, but must embody it, be in its entirety a concrete illustration of his theme. A theme in

itself does not suggest directly an action. The author approaches plot by the route: what conceivable action, what characters, would embody this theme, make it evident to the audience? Just mental hard labor: the problem is set and must be solved. And he will have to keep close guard throughout against the temptation to expound to the audience instead of revealing to them through the action; in other words, to write a thesis in dialogue.

A character may be immediately suggestive of plot. There are some people to whom action seems to gravitate. They do things and things happen to them. Any person unadjusted to his environment suggests drama, and drama which easily develops either a psychological or a sociological theme. Or a man who seems adjusted to his environment may suggest a reversal. Say a man is in a position of wealth and power and seems at home there. One may be tempted to speculate, What would he do if he lost his wealth? What would the busy business woman do if she fell in love? Such a speculation as a generalization leads back to the play for the sake of a theme, and is liable to descend into the thesis play. But if the interest is in the character—what would John Rhodes do, because of what he is in all the intricacies of his character, and because of all the surrounding circumstances of his life, if he lost his wealth; or what would such a woman as Irene Wolverson do if love threatened her career—the prospective dramatist is on the track of a plot. The picturesque characters who do not seem liable to conflict can be saved up for the secondary parts, where they are very useful to give the colors of life to a play or to supply minor complications.

The beginning playwright who finds himself attracted first of all to plot material, who gets excited because some story he meets or imagines would make a good play, or because some incident would go well on the stage—who thinks readily of good scenes, of complications, of climaxes—is fortunate. They are the materials of his craft, and love of them to the dramatist is like the poet's love of words and phrases or the painter's love of his pigments.

There is no use prescribing formulae in creative activity.

Everyone has to follow the bent of his own mind. Sometimes, however, there are potentialities for a method undiscovered until it has been tried. A particularly fortunate correlation of plot, character, and theme interest could be stated as follows. Let the author start with a good plot, it makes no difference what it is or where he finds it. Let him present the story, translate, if necessary, in terms of a background and kind of people he knows and understands. Then let him develop the play earnestly and sincerely in truth to the characters and to life as he sees it. In the end he is likely to find that he has created a theme almost unawares.

Everyone has his individual and fundamental beliefs and attitudes on life. A sincere presentation of any phase of life must inevitably be in the light of his basic view of the whole. It is not necessary, in fact it is impossible, to present one's whole philosophy of life in one great opus, a common impulse for the first play. Nor is it necessary, perhaps not even desirable, that the first play be a profound and serious contribution to society. Farce and melodrama have their place as well as social drama and tragedy. Pure comedy may be as significant as either. To be in company with Shakespeare should always be a comfort: he wrote *A Comedy of Errors* before *As You Like It*, and whatever part he had in *Titus Andronicus* preceded *King Lear*. He learned his craft by easy stages and sometimes fumbled before he created his great dramas. There is ample time, and there may be any number of plays ahead. No one of them, but the sum of all, may convey what one person has to say about life. It takes both *As You Like It* and *King Lear*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Measure for Measure*, and *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, to give us some notion of Shakespeare's philosophy of life from which the dazzling illumination fell now in one place, now another.

IV. BUILDING THE PLAY

THE human body is capable of its directed movements and exertion of force because of the strong skeleton and muscles underneath the soft flesh. The movements of lower organisms without skeletal structure, the amoeba, the sea anemone, the jellyfish, are amorphous and vague. A work of art is a living organism which demands for exertion of its finely directed purposes and energy a well-devised skeletal structure. Compositional organization is essential to music, the painter works from a design of dynamic lines, the sculptor molds his clay upon an armature of lead pipe. Every art must start from form. Especially must a drama, which is most directly a representation of the activity of human life, possess solid construction.

The basic structure of a play, as presented in Chapter II, is briefly the beginning of a conflict, the movement by complications to a crisis or turning point, and the movement to the resolution of the conflict. Preceding the inception of the conflict there will be an introductory part, and following the end of the conflict there may be a concluding part. Some technical terms will have to be established for convenience of discussion. The same terminology has not been used by all writers on structure of drama. It is desirable that the terms used be as accurately descriptive as possible, convenient, and the more generally recognized the better. Analysis of the parts of a play will establish the terms.

A play opens with presentation of a situation that in some way is poised, in a state of unstable equilibrium. The audience recognizes a potentiality of conflict which creates a minor state of question, of suspense, but the question is not formulated; conflict is not yet assured, nor do we know the form and direction the conflict will take. We only recognize, more or less definitely, that the status quo of someone

on the stage is vulnerable. Then some new element enters which precipitates the conflict. From now on a dramatic movement is inescapable; the character must exercise his will and faculties against an opposing force to avert disaster or gain a desire. The question of the play as a whole, the answer to which will end the play, is formulated in the minds of the audience. This question will be called the *major dramatic question*.

The point of inception of the conflict has been designated in various ways: initiation of the conflict, precipitation of the conflict, projection of the question, inciting moment, and attack. Reference either to the conflict or the question alone is somewhat unsatisfactory because both principles are involved. A phrase combining the two would be cumbersome. There is also the difficulty in reference to the question that, while a question is always created with the introduction of the conflict, the form which the question takes may change with the development of the conflict. The other terms are not highly expressive descriptively; *attack*, however, is the most generally recognized, and the most convenient, and is the term I shall use. The attack, then, is the point of precipitation of the conflict and projection of the major dramatic question. It is the point at which an inescapable action becomes evident to the audience, and a question demanding solution is created in their minds.

The point at which the major dramatic question either in its original or a developed form is answered is clearly and adequately described by the term *resolution*. "Catastrophe," from Greek meaning "a turning down," and "denouement," from French meaning "an untying," are sometimes used for the resolving event of a drama in general, but catastrophe is more commonly applied to tragedy and denouement to comedy.

The turning point has generally been designated as the climax or crisis. "Climax" is misleading because it might with equal fitness be applied to the resolution. Climax applied to the turning point suggests increasing tension up to that point, and relaxation following it. What actually happens is that the tension continues to increase in a well-

constructed play from the turning point to the resolution, but is given a new direction and impetus at the turning point. At the attack the principal character knows to a degree the nature of the conflict upon which he is entering, and acts accordingly. The course of the action leads through a rising series of complications to an unforeseen and intensified development of the original situation, and the character is confronted by a crucial and final demand for decision and direction of the will. This is the turning point, the climax of one movement of the play, but not of the play as a whole. The play should move climactically to the resolution. In terms of the analogy of the wave movement used earlier, *the turning point is the crest of the final wave*. A wave is poised at its crest; then it breaks and delivers its blow in its fall. *The blow is the resolution*. The tension following the turning point is of a different kind from that preceding, more of the mind and less of the nerves. It is perfectly true that the particular kind of tension which reaches its climax at the turning point breaks at that point, and does not rise again. One more often finds himself on the edge of his seat gripping the arms at the crisis than at the resolution of a play. The play may be more exciting to the crisis, but more absorbing after the crisis. Perhaps it would be most accurate to call what follows the turning point intensified interest, or consciousness of significance. Often the major dramatic question changes at the turning point from what will happen to the principal character to how will the character react, what will he do? Character interest may replace external plot interest. *Crisis*, a point of determination, or turning point, is an exact term for the purpose and will be used. It is, in fact, almost impossible to discuss the turning point of a play accurately without using the word "crucial."

In planning the construction of a play, the first points for the writer to determine are the *attack*, *crisis*, and *resolution*. These three points fix the main outline of the plot, to which and from which the writer must build.

The attack, crisis, and resolution divide the play into two main movements, most commonly called "the rising action"

and "the falling action." This terminology has been objected to on the same ground as "climax" for the crisis, that "rising action" suggests increase of tension to a climax, and "falling action" relaxation. This confusion is unnecessary if the wave movement is kept in mind. The succession of rising waves has developed the impetus which lifts the final wave to its crest. At the poised moment of the crest there is a tension which breaks, but what follows is not relaxation but release of energy; the fall is the delivery of the force accumulated in the rise. The movement from the crisis to the resolution of a play is certainly not the gliding subsidence of a wave in the open sea, but is the boiling, swirling caldron of the breaking of a wave on an obstruction, as the shore or a boat, during which the intensity of interest for the onlooker increases until the final outcome of the blow can be seen. To no one who has stood on a boat when a wave towered at its crest over the prow and then broke with all its force on the deck, will "falling action" suggest relaxation of interest. Aristotle used terms which Professor Butcher translates the "Complication" and the "Untangling," and these terms have been frequently used in modern commentaries. "Untangling" is unfortunate in its suggestion of a rather boring process which at most produces a quickening of interest when the end is in sight. More fundamentally, "untangling" is from the outside, a process from the dramatist and the audience, without suggestion of an inner necessity, a force generated within the drama driving on to a conclusion. "Winding" and "unwinding" would be more apt as derived from the winding of a spring, or of two ropes together, and the release of the tension developed. *Rising action* and *falling action*, however, are familiar, convenient, and expressive if properly understood in conjunction with picturing of the wave movement, and will be used here.

So far, the attack, crisis, and resolution have been spoken of as points. They are points on a diagram of the structure of a drama, but actually within the drama, although any one of these phases of the movement may be projected in a single speech, or line, or an action, it is usually a space of

variable duration. More often than not it is accurate to speak of the attack, crisis, or resolution as beginning at a certain point and coming to a focus at another. Even beyond this it should always be remembered that a drama is a single action, that is, a continuous movement starting from the beginning and leading into each development. So most truly the play is building from the opening to the attack, and the crisis and resolution similarly take their rise from all that precedes.

Complications must be referred to frequently. They are the stuff of which the bulk of the drama structurally is built. A *complication* was defined earlier as any new element that enters the situation after the story starts and affects the way in which the conflict will go. The complication may operate as a simple furtherance or hindrance to the fortunes of the principal character. That is, the will of the principal character is a force moving in a given direction, receiving aids and meeting obstacles. The complication may also come as a force from off the line of this established movement and make an impact upon it, in which case the complication deflects the line of action, alters its direction. It might appear at first thought that the complication which precipitates the crisis, since the crisis is the major turning point, would always be of this type. Actually, so major a complication is unlikely to come from off the main line of action in a sound drama; it will be most absolutely inherent in the opposing force, though unforeseen by the principal character.

Three complications, of course, are of major importance: the complication precipitating the attack, the crucial complication, and the resolving complication. From the attack the rising action progresses by a series of complications culminating in the crisis. Each complication within the play is itself a unit involving dramatic structure. It starts from an attack creating a question, called a *minor dramatic question*. It may then either rise to a crisis and turn to a resolution, or in so small a unit, may rise in a straight climax to its resolution without a turning point. The resolution of one minor dramatic question may at the same time be a new

complication, and create the next question. If not, for the sustained suspense the next complication must enter shortly. Complications may also be interwoven by the introduction of a new complication while an earlier complication is still in suspense. The answer to each minor dramatic question points toward an answer to the major dramatic question. The play may move from the crisis to the resolution either by a series of complications, or by a single complication arising from the crisis.

After the writer has conceived an idea for a play and has outlined it into attack, crisis, and resolution, the main building of the play lies before him in the creation, arrangement, and organization of the complications. Each complication must be a well-constructed dramatic unit in itself, and must fit into its place in the proper climactic movement of the play as a whole.

The part of the play preceding the attack is called the *introduction*. Its functions are introduction of the characters, setting the stage, and exposition of the situation. The audience must know who are involved in the dramatic situation, must be concerned with what happens to them, and must understand them well enough so that their reactions to further developments as they arise will have an inner probability. The audience must be acquainted with essential facts of the scene such as time and place, and setting the stage may include creating an atmosphere or mood in the background of the action. Exposition of the situation is a matter of acquainting the audience with the circumstances out of which, in conjunction with the characters, the conflict will arise. This exposition will include both the details of the immediate situation and *antecedent material*, circumstances preceding the opening of the play which have led up to the immediate situation, and details from the past lives of the characters which explain their reactions.

The *exposition* of a play, including both the immediate situation, analysis of characters, and antecedent material, is not all packed into the introductory space. In fact, the earlier the conflict is precipitated the better. Only so much exposition is necessary before the attack as is required to

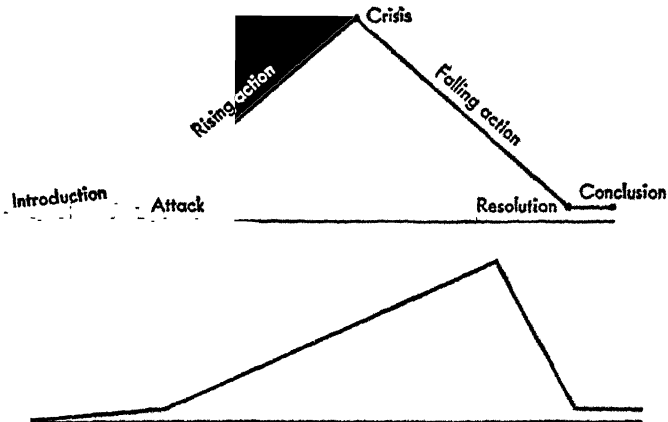
prepare for the attack, to make it clear when it comes. At the vital points of action in the play there must be no distracting questions projected into the minds of the audience to break the tension and distract the attention from the significance of the moment. This means that exposition may be woven in throughout the course of the play, each bit in time for the situation which it is to illuminate. At best, exposition and action are inseparable. The audience should never become aware that it is receiving information. In the perfectly constructed play the characters in what they naturally say in response to the stress of situation and emotion reveal what it is necessary for the audience to know, and what one character reveals may actually operate as a complication determining the action of another character. The process of exposition and action is like that of putting together a block puzzle. Each piece determines where the next is to go, and the form the structure is to take appears when the last key piece goes in. Skill in this integration of the exposition and action is one of the marks of the technically expert dramatist.

Preparation is the term used for the introduction of details in advance that are necessary for immediate acceptance of some later step in the action. The audience must not be distracted by minor questions and details at the crucial moments. *Preparation* runs all the way from antecedent material about a character necessary to give probability to his reactions, to creating a trivial occasion for a man to take the revolver out of the desk drawer and put it back so that the audience won't be surprised at its presence when later in the play he shoots himself with it.

The more readily identifiable functions of the *introduction* as distinguished from the rest of the play have been stated. The introduction is under the same necessity as the rest of the play of creating and sustaining suspense. Suspense depends upon complications and question. Preceding the attack and the major dramatic question, then, must come minor complications and minor dramatic questions. These must not be detached and mechanical, or dead ends, but must together constitute the rise to the attack. Further-

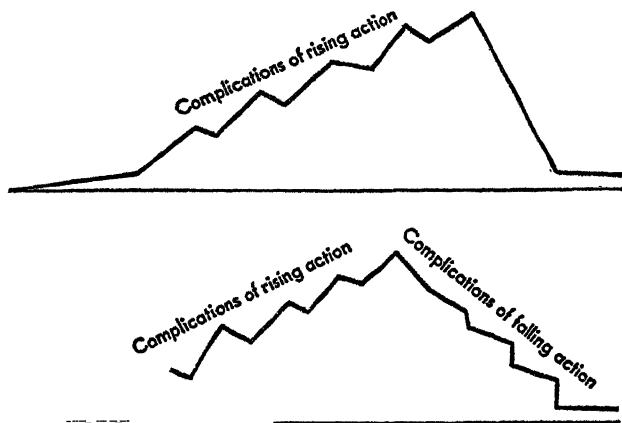
more, upon the very opening of the play falls the responsibility of immediately arresting attention. This may be accomplished by immediate projection of a question, of suspense, but may also be gained by something picturesque, by interest in a character, or by mere bustle, physical activity, on the stage.

A play does not necessarily have a *conclusion*. The resolution may also be the curtain. More often there will be some space following the resolution. The most important functions of a conclusion are to emphasize or point in some way the significance of the resolution, and to establish the appropriate mood, as in tragedy the full cycle of emotion ends properly in a sense of calm after a storm. A conclusion may also be necessary to clear up minor questions not answered in the resolution, the business of which is the major dramatic question. If there is a full parallel sub-plot, its resolution follows that of the main plot.



The structure of a play may be diagrammed simply as a short, slightly rising line (the *introduction*) to the *attack*. From the point of the *attack* a longer more acutely rising line (the *rising action*) to the *crisis*. From the point of the *crisis* a descending line (the *falling action*) to the *resolution*. From the point of the *resolution* possibly a short level line,

the *conclusion*. The line of the *falling action* may be equal in length and of the same angle as that of the *rising action*; it is more likely to be shorter and of more acute angle. In a more elaborated diagram the lines of the *rising action*, and in most cases that of the *falling action*, will be saw-toothed, representing the *complications*, each mounting to a crisis and descending to a resolution, the climactic wave rhythm.



One more technical term: it is more convenient to speak of the *protagonist* than to say "the principal character of a drama."

It is now time to lift the curse of the abstract, and to see the principles of construction at work in a play. *A Night at an Inn* by Lord Dunsany has been selected for the first analysis because it is a very simple play in which the outline of basic structure stands out very clearly. The play would belong to a somewhat higher category of drama if the construction were less obvious, but would not serve the purpose here so well. The play is also selected, in part, because it is not at all the kind of play in content that I have suggested for the beginning playwright, so that the degree of concentration we will give it is not likely to lead to imitation. By the remoteness of the material, detachment is gained for the study of pure structure.

Before writing *A Night at an Inn*, Lord Dunsany had established himself as a master of a peculiarly beautiful and individual kind of fantasy, set in an "Oriental Never Never Land" of his own imagination. Those earlier plays are richer in content than *A Night at an Inn*, with more subtlety of construction and their own distinguishing beauty. The early plays were produced at the Abbey Theatre. *A Night at an Inn* was first produced at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York on April 22, 1916. The performance was a great success, and the play has been a Little Theatre and amateur favorite generally ever since. With its excellence of construction, *A Night at an Inn* has some noticeable technical flaws, perhaps because it "was written between tea and dinner at a single sitting," as the author has been quoted.

If the reader is not already acquainted with the play, he should read it through first, keeping his eyes closed to the running commentary opposite the text. In fact, he should read it twice before reading the commentary. The first time he should read it without thought of analysis, just as he would go to the theatre for pleasure, relaxing himself to the play and finding out what it does to him. Then he should go back through it and attempt to apply the preceding discussion in this chapter to it for himself. The third reading will be to compare his own analysis with that on the following pages.

TEXT AND ANALYSIS
of
A NIGHT AT AN INN

By Lord Dunsany

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A NIGHT AT AN INN

By Lord Dunsany

CHARACTERS

A. E. SCOTT-FORTESCUE (The Toff), *a dilapidated gentleman.*
WILLIAM JONES (Bill) }
ALBERT THOMAS } *merchant sailors.*
JACOB SMITH (Sniggers) }
First Priest of Klesh.
Second Priest of Klesh.
Third Priest of Klesh.
Klesh.

The curtain rises on a room in an inn. SNIGGERS and BILL are talking, THE TOFF is reading a paper. ALBERT sits a little apart.

⁽¹⁾SNIGGERS. What's his idea, I wonder?

BILL. I don't know.

SNIGGERS. And how much longer will he keep us here?

BILL. We've been here three days.

SNIGGERS. And 'aven't seen a soul.

BILL. And a pretty penny it cost us when he rented the pub.

SNIGGERS. (Ow) long did 'e rent the pub for?

BILL. You never know with him.

SNIGGERS. It's lonely enough.

BILL. 'Ow long did you rent the pub for, Toffy? [THE TOFF continues to read a sporting paper; he takes no notice of what is said.]⁽¹⁾

⁽²⁾SNIGGERS. 'E's such a toff.

BILL. Yet 'e's clever, no mistake.

SNIGGERS. Those clever ones are the beggars to make a muddle. Their plans are clever enough, but they don't work, and then they make a mess of things much worse than you or me.⁽²⁾

A NIGHT AT AN INN

ANALYSIS

(1) Question is created at the opening by the questions among the characters, a rather obvious device, but well handled. The questions are justified by the attitude of the Toff, and suspense is gained by the stage effect of the two characters talking in low tones with side-looks at the Toff. Exposition of three days, a lonely place, and a rented empty public house. Suspense added by the lonely place.

(2) Characterization of the Toff. Preparation for mis-carriage of plans of the Toff.

BILL. Ah!

⁽³⁾SNIGGERS. I don't like this place.

BILL. Why not?

SNIGGERS. I don't like the looks of it.⁽³⁾

⁽⁴⁾BILL. He's keeping us here because here those niggers can't find us. The three heathen priests what was looking for us so. But we want to go and sell our ruby soon.⁽¹⁾

ALBERT. There's no sense in it.

BILL. Why not, Albert?

⁽⁵⁾ALBERT. Because I gave those black devils the slip in Hull.

BILL. You give 'em the slip, Albert?

ALBERT. The slip, all three of them. The fellows with the gold spots on their foreheads. I had the ruby then and I give them the slip in Hull.

BILL. How did you do it, Albert?

ALBERT. I had the ruby and they were following me. . . .

BILL. Who told them you had the ruby? You didn't show it.

ALBERT. No. . . . But they kind of know.

SNIGGERS. They kind of know, Albert?

ALBERT. Yes, they know if you've got it. Well, they sort of mouched after me, and I tells a policeman and he says, O, they were only three poor niggers and they wouldn't hurt me.⁽⁵⁾ ⁽⁶⁾Ugh! When I thought of what they did in Malta to poor old Jim.

BILL. Yes, and to George in Bombay before we started.

SNIGGERS. Ugh!⁽⁶⁾

BILL. Why didn't you give 'em in charge?

ALBERT. What about the ruby, Bill?

BILL. Ah!

⁽⁷⁾ALBERT. Well, I did better than that. I walks up and down through Hull. I walks slow enough. And then I turns a corner and I runs. I never sees a corner but I turns it. But sometimes I let a corner pass just to fool them. I twists about like a hare. Then I sits down and waits. No priests.

SNIGGERS. What?

(3) Vague suspense through reaction of character and atmosphere. Characterization of Sniggers, the querulous, "wiser-than-the-other-fellow" whine of the Cockney, which has determined every speech of Sniggers thus far; nervous wiry type.

(4) Antecedent material, again rather obviously introduced, but plausible with the secretiveness of the Toff.

(5) Antecedent material, preparation for the mysterious appearance of the priests.

(6) Antecedent material, preparation for the undeclared atrocity of the idol.

(7) Characterization of Albert through manner of speech, the heavy, single-track movement of the mind of a big ox-like fellow, particularly in repetition of "I give 'em the slip." If Bill's speeches are traced throughout the play, he will be seen to be superior to the others, without Sniggers's nervousness or Albert's dullness. He has readier appreciation of the Toff's cleverness and more loyalty. He is the leader when action is underway.

ALBERT. No heathen black devils with gold spots on their face. I give 'em the slip.⁽⁷⁾

BILL. Well done, Albert!

SNIGGERS [*after a sigh of content*]. Why didn't you tell us?

⁽⁸⁾ALBERT. 'Cause 'e won't let you speak. 'E's got 'is plans and 'e thinks we're silly folk. Things must be done 'is way. And all the time I've give 'em the slip. Might 'ave 'ad one o' them crooked knives in him before now but for me who give 'em the slip in Hull.⁽⁸⁾

BILL. Well done, Albert! Do you hear that, Toffy? Albert has give 'em the slip.

THE TOFF. Yes, I hear.

SNIGGERS. Well, what do you say to that?

THE TOFF. O. . . . Well done, Albert!

ALBERT. And what a' you going to do?

⁽⁹⁾THE TOFF. Going to wait.⁽⁹⁾

ALBERT. Don't seem to know what 'e's waiting for.

SNIGGERS. It's a nasty place.

ALBERT. It's getting silly, Bill. Our money's gone and we want to sell the ruby. Let's get on to a town.

BILL. But 'e won't come.

ALBERT. Then we'll leave him.

SNIGGERS. We'll be all right if we keep away from Hull.

ALBERT. We'll go to London.

BILL. But 'e must 'ave 'is share.

SNIGGERS. All right. Only let's go. ⁽¹⁰⁾[*To THE TOFF.*] We're going, do you hear? Give us the ruby.

THE TOFF. Certainly. [*He gives them a ruby from his waistcoat pocket; it is the size of a small hen's egg. He goes on reading his paper.*]

ALBERT. Come on, Sniggers. [*Exeunt ALBERT and SNIGGERS.*]

BILL. Good-by, old man. We'll give you your fair share, but there's nothing to do here—no girls, no halls, and we must sell the ruby.

THE TOFF. I'm not a fool, Bill.

BILL. No, no, of course not. Of course you ain't, and you've helped us a lot. Good-by. You'll say good-by?

(8) Albert's antecedent material is dramatic in that it rises to a point of conflict in this speech, the attack of a minor, introductory complication, the foolish self-confidence and impatience of the men.

(9) Crisis of the introductory complication.

(10) Resolution of the introductory complication, leads directly into the attack of the play.

THE TOFF. Oh, yes. Good-by. [*Still reads his paper.*
Exit BILL.⁽¹⁰⁾ ⁽¹¹⁾THE TOFF *puts a revolver on the table be-*
side him and goes on with his paper.⁽¹¹⁾ *After a moment*
⁽¹²⁾*the three men come rushing in again, frightened.]*

SNIGGERS [*out of breath*]. We've come back, Toffy.

THE TOFF. So you have.

ALBERT. Toffy. . . . How did they get here?⁽¹²⁾

THE TOFF. They walked, of course.

ALBERT. But it's eighty miles.

SNIGGERS. Did you know they were here, Toffy?

THE TOFF. Expected them about now.

ALBERT. Eighty miles!

BILL. Toffy, old man . . . what are we to do?

THE TOFF. Ask Albert.

BILL. If they can do things like this, there's no one can save us but you, Toffy. . . . I always knew you were a clever one. We won't be fools any more. We'll obey you, Toffy.

⁽¹³⁾THE TOFF. You're brave enough and strong enough. There isn't many that would steal a ruby eye out of an idol's head, and such an idol as that was to look at, and on such a night. You're brave enough, Bill. But you're all three of you fools. Jim would have none of my plans, and where's Jim? And George. What did they do to him?⁽¹³⁾

SNIGGERS. Don't, Toffy!

THE TOFF. Well, then, your strength is no use to you. You want cleverness; or they'll have you the way they had George and Jim.

ALL. Ugh!

⁽¹⁴⁾THE TOFF. Those black priests would follow you round the world in circles. Year after year, till they got the idol's eye. And if we died with it, they'd follow our grandchildren. That fool thinks he can escape from men like that by running round three streets in the town of Hull.

ALBERT. God's truth, *you* 'aven't escaped them, because they're 'ere.⁽¹⁴⁾

THE TOFF. So I supposed.

ALBERT. You *supposed*!

(11) Preparation for the attack, creates suspense in the silent interval.

(12) The attack of the play. The immediate question created is, What did the three men see? But at the same time it is evident that the opposing force is present, and that the final stage of a conflict is now inescapable, with the major dramatic question: Will the four men achieve secure possession of the ruby, or will they all suffer some unknown but horrible fate, as Jim and George?

(13) Antecedent material, very naturally introduced. Repetition of Jim and George part increases tension and is preparation building up the sense of horror at the end.

(14) Answers the question specifically, What did the three men see? Prepares for the conduct of the priests.

⁽¹⁵⁾THE TOFF. Yes, I believe there's no announcement in the Society papers. But I took this country seat especially to receive them. There's plenty of room if you dig, it is pleasantly situated, and, what is more important, it is in a very quiet neighborhood. So I am at home to them this afternoon.⁽¹⁵⁾

BILL. Well, *you're* a deep one.

⁽¹⁶⁾THE TOFF. And remember, you've only my wits between you and death, and don't put your futile plans against those of an educated gentleman.

ALBERT. If you're a gentleman, why don't you go about among gentlemen instead of the likes of us?

THE TOFF. Because I was too clever for them as I am too clever for you.

ALBERT. Too clever for them?

THE TOFF. I never lost a game of cards in my life.

BILL. You never lost a game?

THE TOFF. Not when there was money in it.

BILL. Well, well!

THE TOFF. Have a game of poker?

ALL. No, thanks.

THE TOFF. Then do as you're told.

BILL. All right, Toffy.⁽¹⁶⁾

⁽¹⁷⁾SNIGGERS. I saw something just then. Hadn't we better draw the curtains?

THE TOFF. No.

SNIGGERS. What?

THE TOFF. Don't draw the curtains.

SNIGGERS. O, all right.

BILL. But, Toffy, they can see us. One doesn't let the enemy do that. I don't see why. . . .

THE TOFF. No, of course you don't.

BILL. O, all right, Toffy. [*All begin to pull out revolvers.*]

THE TOFF [*putting his own away*]. No revolvers, please.

ALBERT. Why not? ,

THE TOFF. Because I don't want any noise at my party. We might get guests that hadn't been invited. *Knives* are a different matter. [*All draw knives.* THE TOFF *signs to*

(15) Preparation for the Toff's plan.

(16) A brief complication, the first of the rising action, in the question of the Toff's ascendancy, resolved with the complete submission of the other men. The antecedent material of the Toff's history at cards is a part of the dramatic movement, resolving this complication. The relations of the characters are established, and one of the forces in the conflict is defined: it is to be between the Toff's wits and the as yet unseen power.

(17) Question, in the sense of curiosity, is created and tension developed. Emphasis on the relations established in preceding complication. The confidence and self-assurance of the Toff built up.

them not to draw them yet. TOFFY has already taken back his ruby.]

BILL. I think they're coming, Toffy.

THE TOFF. Not yet.

ALBERT. When will they come?

THE TOFF. When I am quite ready to receive them. Not before.

SNIGGERS. I should like to get this over.

THE TOFF. Should you? Then we'll have them now.⁽¹⁷⁾

SNIGGERS. Now?

⁽¹⁸⁾THE TOFF. Yes. Listen to me. You shall do as you see me do. You will all pretend to go out. I'll show you how. I've got the ruby. When they see me alone they will come for their idol's eye.

⁽¹⁹⁾BILL. How can they tell like this which of us has it?

THE TOFF. I confess I don't know, but they seem to.⁽¹⁹⁾

SNIGGERS. What will you do when they come in?

THE TOFF. I shall do nothing.

SNIGGERS. What?

THE TOFF. They will creep up behind me. Then, my friends, Sniggers and Bill and Albert, who gave them the slip, will do what they can.

BILL. All right, Toffy. Trust us.

THE TOFF. If you're a little slow, you will see enacted the cheerful spectacle that accompanied the demise of Jim.

SNIGGERS. Don't, Toffy. We'll be there, all right.

THE TOFF. Very well. Now watch me. [*He goes past the windows to the inner door R. He opens it inwards, then under cover of the open door, he slips down on his knee and closes it, remaining on the inside, appearing to have gone out. He signs to the others, who understand. Then he appears to re-enter in the same manner.*]

THE TOFF. Now, I shall sit with my back to the door. You go out one by one, so far as our friends can make out. Crouch very low to be on the safe side. They mustn't see you through the window.⁽¹⁸⁾ ⁽²⁰⁾[BILL makes his sham exit.]

THE TOFF. Remember, no revolvers. The police are, I believe, proverbially inquisitive. [*The other two follow*]
BILL. All three are now crouching inside the door R. THE

(18) Exposition for the complication immediately to follow. The exposition is itself dramatic action, complication two of the rising action, as it starts with the question of what the Toff's plan is, and resolves the question. Tension develops as the audience foresees in the rehearsal the danger in the plan. It is a plan delicately poised for success or fatal failure.

(19) Answers what might otherwise be a distracting question at the crucial moment, and intensifies sense of mysterious powers in the opposition.

(20) Complication three, the first of a series of three which constitute the main body of the rising action. The slow opening of the door before the priest appears is a well-devised attack; the poised moment just before Bill leaps, when the priest approaches the Toff and Bill ascertains no more are coming, is the crisis, resolved when the priest is successfully knifed. There is a good climactic rise in complications one, two, and three of the rising action. There is a structural weakness in the play, in that complications four and five are too nearly at the same level with three, and too similar.

TOFF *puts the ruby beside him on the table. He lights a cigarette. The door at the back opens so slowly that you can hardly say at what moment it began. THE TOFF picks up his paper. A native of India wriggles along the floor ever so slowly, seeking cover from chairs. He moves L. where THE TOFF is. The three sailors are R. SNIGGERS and ALBERT lean forward. BILL's arm keeps them back. An arm-chair had better conceal them from the Indian. The black Priest nears THE TOFF. BILL watches to see if any more are coming. Then he leaps forward alone—he has taken his boots off—and knifes the Priest. The Priest tries to shout but BILL's left hand is over his mouth. THE TOFF continues to read his sporting paper. He never looks around.*⁽²⁰⁾

⁽²¹⁾BILL [*sotto voce*]. There's only one, Toffy. What shall we do?⁽²¹⁾

⁽²²⁾THE TOFF [*without turning his head*]. Only one?

BILL. Yes.

THE TOFF. Wait a moment. Let me think. [*Still apparently absorbed in his paper.*] Ah, yes. You go back, Bill. We must attract another guest. . . . Now, are you ready?

BILL. Yes.

THE TOFF. All right. You shall now see my demise at my Yorkshire residence. You must receive guests for me.⁽²²⁾ ⁽²³⁾[*He leaps up in full view of the window, flings up both arms and falls to the floor near the dead Priest.*] Now, be ready. [*His eyes close. There is a long pause. Again the door opens, very, very slowly. Another priest creeps in. He has three golden spots upon his forehead. He looks round, then he creeps up to his companion and turns him over and looks inside of his clenched hands. Then he looks at the recumbent TOFF. Then he creeps toward him. BILL slips after him and knifes him like the other with his left hand over his mouth.*]⁽²³⁾

⁽²⁴⁾BILL [*sotto voce*]. We've only got two, Toffy.

THE TOFF. Still another.⁽²⁴⁾

BILL. What'll we do?

THE TOFF [*sitting up*]. Hum.

BILL. This is the best way, much.

(21) The resolution of complication three creates complication four.

(22) Introduction to complication four.

(23) Complication four, with distinct attack, crisis, and resolution in the Toff's initial action, the approach of the priest to the Toff, and the priest knifed by Bill. Interest is sustained by the variation on the initial device, and tension is added over complication three by the pressure of time on the Toff for the exercise of his wits.

(24) Again, the resolution of complication four creates complication five.

THE TOFF. Out of the question. Never play the same game twice.

BILL. Why not, Toffy?

THE TOFF. Doesn't work if you do.

BILL. Well?

THE TOFF. I have it, Albert. You will now walk into the room. I showed you how to do it.

ALBERT. Yes.

THE TOFF. Just run over here and have a fight at this window with these two men.

ALBERT. But they're . . .

THE TOFF. Yes, they're dead, my perspicuous Albert. But Bill and I are going to resuscitate them. . . . Come on.

[BILL picks up a body under the arms.]

⁽²⁵⁾THE TOFF. That's right, Bill. [*Does the same.*] Come and help us, Sniggers. . . . [SNIGGERS comes.] Keep low, keep low. Wave their arms about, Sniggers. Don't show yourself. Now, Albert, over you go. Our Albert is slain. Back you get, Bill. Back, Sniggers. Still, Albert. Mustn't move when he comes. Not a muscle.⁽²⁶⁾ [*A face appears at the window and stays for some time.*⁽²⁶⁾ *Then the door opens and, looking craftily round, the third Priest enters. He looks at his companions' bodies and turns round. He suspects something.*⁽²⁷⁾ *He takes up one of the knives and with a knife in each hand he puts his back to the wall. He looks to the left and right.*]

THE TOFF. Come on, Bill. [*The Priest rushes to the door. THE TOFF knifes the last Priest from behind.*]⁽²⁷⁾

⁽²⁸⁾THE TOFF. A good day's work, my friends.

BILL. Well done, Toffy. Oh, you are a deep one!

ALBERT. A deep one if ever there was one.

SNIGGERS. There ain't any more, Bill, are there?

THE TOFF. No more in the world, my friend.

BILL. Aye, that's all there are. There were only three in the temple. Three priests and their beastly idol.

ALBERT. What is it worth, Toffy? Is it worth a thousand pounds?

THE TOFF. It's worth all they've got in the shop. Worth just whatever we like to ask for it.

(25) Attack of complication five. In spite of a degree of repetitiousness in complication five over three and four, some climactic effect is gained by the increased physical activity and the tension of the Toff's staccato speeches.

(26) A nice variation on the slowly opening door of complication three to increase tension before the entrance of the priest.

(27) Crisis and resolution of complication five.

(28) The rising action to this point has consisted of a series of complications rising to a very considerable climax. There remains the still higher climax of the crisis of the play. The interval to the entrance of Sniggers is a long lull which allows the audience to recover its breath, so to speak, in order that it may respond to the full to the further climax, and also gives emphasis by contrast to what is to follow. A lull preceding the final rise to the crisis frequently occurs in dramatic structure. In this play the interval has a force of irony in the confidence of victory so soon to be overthrown. This confidence is important. The three are light-minded and their confidence is not significant; but before the end of the scene the Toff's confidence in his power to foresee everything has been emphasized until it seems overweening and begins to suggest an overthrow from some completely unforeseen source. By this means a right degree of tension and question is sustained. The audience does not feel that all is over. This scene also gives opportunity for what is technically called a *reversal*, a sudden and complete turn, either from good fortune to bad, or bad to good.

ALBERT. Then we're millionaires now.

THE TOFF. Yes, and, what is more important, we no longer have any heirs.

BILL. We'll have to sell it now.

ALBERT. That won't be easy. It's a pity it isn't small and we had half a dozen. Hadn't the idol any other on him?

⁽²⁹⁾BILL. No, he was green jade all over and only had this one eye. He had it in the middle of his forehead and was a long sight uglier than anything else in the world.⁽²⁹⁾

SNIGGERS. I'm sure we ought all to be very grateful to Toffy.

BILL. And, indeed, we ought.

ALBERT. If it hadn't been for him . . .

BILL. Yes, if it hadn't been for old Toffy . . .

SNIGGERS. He's a deep one.

⁽³⁰⁾THE TOFF. Well, you see I just have a knack of foreseeing things.

SNIGGERS. I should think you did.

BILL. Why, I don't suppose anything happens that our Toff doesn't foresee. Does it, Toffy?

THE TOFF. Well, I don't think it does, Bill. I don't think it often does.⁽³⁰⁾

BILL. Life is no more than just a game of cards to our old Toff.

THE TOFF. Well, we've taken these fellows' trick.

SNIGGERS [*going to window*]. It wouldn't do for anyone to see them.

THE TOFF. Oh, nobody will come this way. ⁽³¹⁾We're all alone on a moor.⁽³¹⁾

⁽³²⁾BILL. Where will we put them?

THE TOFF. Bury them in the cellar, but there's no hurry.⁽³²⁾

BILL. And what then, Toffy?

THE TOFF. Why, then we'll go to London and upset the ruby business. We have really come through this job very nicely.

BILL. I think the first thing that we ought to do is to give a little supper to old Toffy. We'll bury these fellows tonight.

(29) Preparation for the idol.

(30) Preparation for the curtain line.

(31) A bit of exposition which sustains the atmosphere of the setting and adds irony to the entrance of the idol.

(32) This question, like those concerning the disposal of the ruby and the possibility of someone coming, helps to sustain the quiet interval. At the same time, the casual disposing of each question helps to create the mood of confidence and relaxation.

ALBERT. Yes, let's.

SNIGGERS. The very thing!

BILL. And we'll all drink his health.

ALBERT. Good old Toffy!

SNIGGERS. He ought to have been a general or a premier.

⁽³³⁾ [They get bottles from cupboard, etc.]

THE TOFF. Well, we've earned our bit of a supper.

[They sit down.]

⁽³⁴⁾ BILL [glass in hand]. Here's to old Toffy, who guessed everything!⁽³⁴⁾

ALBERT and SNIGGERS. Good old Toffy!

BILL. Toffy, who saved our lives and made our fortunes.

ALBERT and SNIGGERS. Hear! Hear!

THE TOFF. And here's to Bill, who saved me twice to-night.

BILL. Couldn't have done it but for your cleverness, Toffy.

SNIGGERS. Hear, hear! Hear! Hear!

ALBERT. He foresees everything.

BILL. A speech, Toffy. A speech from our general.

ALL. Yes, a speech.

SNIGGERS. A speech.

⁽³⁵⁾ THE TOFF. Well, get me some water. This whisky's too much for my head, and I must keep it clear till our friends are safe in the cellar.

BILL. Water? Yes, of course. Get him some water, Sniggers.

SNIGGERS. We don't use water here. Where shall I get it?

BILL. Outside in the garden.⁽³⁵⁾ [Exit SNIGGERS.]

ALBERT. Here's to future!

⁽³⁶⁾ BILL. Here's to Albert Thomas, Esquire.

ALBERT. And William Jones, Esquire.⁽³⁶⁾ [Re-enter

SNIGGERS, terrified.]⁽³⁷⁾

THE TOFF. Hullo, here's Jacob Smith, Esquire, J. P., alias Sniggers, back again.

⁽³⁸⁾ SNIGGERS. Toffy, I've been thinking about my share in that ruby. I don't want it, Toffy; I don't want it.

THE TOFF. Nonsense, Sniggers. Nonsense.

SNIGGERS. You shall have it, Toffy, you shall have it

(33) The physical bustle of the toast also helps to sustain the quiet interval.

(34) The final assertion of the Toff's foresight before the reversal.

(35) A plausible device to meet the mechanical necessity of getting Sniggers outside. The manner of introducing the idol is devised for dramatic effect, a matter of deliberate construction. The idol could have walked in directly upon the whole group.

(36) Prepares, with the Toff's address to Sniggers following, for the use of the full names in the resolution, where they add portentousness.

(37) Beginning of the rise to the crisis; Sniggers's re-entrance is the attack of the crucial complication: question, what has frightened Sniggers?

(38) The mystery of what Sniggers has seen, rapidly intensified by the series of questions and Sniggers's terrified but unrevealing replies; the crisis of the complication in Sniggers's earnest but bewildering, "I swear I saw something *what I didn't like*," and his final terror; the solemnity of the Toff's "What has he seen?"; the dead silence, then the portentous steps, constitute a fine build-up for the entrance of the idol. The idol's entrance is the resolution of the complication introducing the crisis of the play, and is the beginning of the crisis. The opposing force is revealed in unforeseen form and power. A new and determining question is immediately created, What will the idol do? The idol's entrance, then, is the attack of a new complication, the crisis of which comes when the idol recovers and replaces its ruby eye, and the resolution when it moves out from the room. This movement is so compact and sustained in tension that the entire complication from entrance to exit of the idol constitutes the *crisis of the play*.

yourself, only say Sniggers has no share in this 'ere ruby. Say it, Toffy, say it!

BILL. Want to turn informer, Sniggers?

SNIGGERS. No, no. Only I don't want the ruby, Toffy. . . .

THE TOFF. No more nonsense, Sniggers. We're all in together in this. If one hangs, we all hang; but they won't outwit me. Besides, it's not a hanging affair, they had their knives.

SNIGGERS. Toffy, Toffy, I always treated you fair, Toffy. I was always one to say, Give Toffy a chance. Take back my share, Toffy.

THE TOFF. What's the matter? What are you driving at?

SNIGGERS. Take it back, Toffy.

THE TOFF. Answer me, what are you up to?

SNIGGERS. I don't want my share any more.

BILL. Have you seen the police? [ALBERT pulls out his knife.]

THE TOFF. No, no knives, Albert.

ALBERT. What then?

THE TOFF. The honest truth in open court, barring the ruby. We were attacked.

SNIGGERS. There's no police.

THE TOFF. Well, then, what's the matter?

BILL. Out with it.

SNIGGERS. I swear to God. . . .

ALBERT. Well?

THE TOFF. Don't interrupt.

SNIGGERS. I swear I saw something *what I didn't like*.

THE TOFF. What you didn't like?

SNIGGERS [*in tears*]. O Toffy, Toffy, take it back. Take my share. Say you take it.

THE TOFF. What has he seen? [*Dead silence, only broken by SNIGGERS's sobs. Then steps are heard. Enter a hideous idol.*⁽⁸⁸⁾ *It is blind and gropes its way. It gropes its way to the ruby and picks it up and screws it into a socket in the forehead. SNIGGERS still weeps softly, the rest stare in horror.*⁽⁸⁹⁾ *The idol steps out, not groping. Its steps move off, then stop.*]⁽³⁹⁾

(39) The apparent significance of the idol's action is followed almost immediately by reversal. When the sound of the idol's steps moves off, the audience, with the characters on the stage, starts to relax, but catches the held breath half-way, gripped by fresh horror when the sound stops. This is the attack of the resolving complication. The resolution of the play is accomplished in the four stages of each man summoned irresistibly to his mysterious and horrible death, the summons to the Toff withheld climactically to the end.

⁽⁴⁰⁾THE TOFF. O, great heavens!

ALBERT [*in a childish, plaintive voice*]. What is it, Toffy?

BILL. Albert, it is that obscene idol [*in a whisper*] come from India.

ALBERT. It is gone.

BILL. It has taken its eye.

SNIGGERS. We are saved.⁽⁴⁰⁾

A VOICE OFF [*with outlandish accent*]. Meestaire William Jones, Able Seaman.⁽⁴¹⁾ [THE TOFF *has never spoken, never moved. He only gazes stupidly in horror.*]

BILL. Albert, Albert, what is this? [*He rises and walks out. One moan is heard. SNIGGERS goes to the window. He falls back sickly.*]

⁽⁴²⁾ALBERT [*in a whisper*]. What has happened?

SNIGGERS. I have seen it. I have seen it. O, I have seen it! [*He returns to table.*]

THE TOFF [*laying his hand very gently on SNIGGERS's arm, speaking softly and winningly.*] What was it, Sniggers?

SNIGGERS. I have seen it.

ALBERT. What?

SNIGGERS. O!⁽⁴²⁾

VOICE. Meestaire Albert Thomas, Able Seaman.

ALBERT. Must I go, Toffy? Toffy, must I go?

SNIGGERS [*clutching him*]. Don't move.

ALBERT [*going*]. Toffy, Toffy. [*Exit.*]

VOICE. Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Seaman.

SNIGGERS. I can't go, Toffy. I can't go. I can't do it. [*He goes.*]

VOICE. Meestaire Arnold Everett Scott-Fortescue, late Esquire, Able Seaman.⁽⁴³⁾

THE TOFF. I did not foresee it.⁽⁴⁴⁾ [*Exit.*]

[THE CURTAIN]

(40) The speeches of relief from each of the three men, ending with "we are saved," point with irony the immediately following first summons to "Meestaire William Jones, Able Seaman." The tension of the audience is held by the Toff's sustained horror, voiced only in his single exclamation, "O, great heavens!" With his greater intelligence, he experiences no moment of relief.

(41) The use of the full names, and accurate titles, enforces the realization of omniscient power in the idol, and adds force and dignity to the summons.

(42) The embodiment in the idol of the inscrutable power of fate beyond human foresight and strength is sustained by the unrevealed manner of death inflicted.

(43) The full name and title of the Toff is given climactic value by not having been heard before in the play, as were the other names.

(44) Conclusion, a curtain line which points the significance of the play.

A Night at an Inn is short even for a one-act play. Such a play is assuredly easier to write than a long play. Such a play, however, takes cameo work if it is to be successful. There are fewer complications than in the larger composition, and the complications themselves are of shorter duration with fewer details involved. The construction of every part must be precise, for a single flaw upon so small a surface will destroy the effect of the whole. The structure as a whole would have been made apparent by analysis that went no further than to identify Sniggers's reentrance, terrified, as the beginning of the rise to the crisis, and the entrance to exit of the idol as the crisis. Within each small unit of the action, however, Lord Dunsany has done precise work. At the risk of confusion in referring to attacks, crises, and resolutions of complications, and of the play as a whole, so numerous and close together, I have endeavored to show that the rise to the crisis is through an introductory complication which is a complete and perfect dramatic unit in itself, with attack, crisis, and resolution; and similarly that the crisis itself is

such a unit. I have seen four or five stagings of the play and can vouch for it from observed audience tension that the crisis is extraordinarily successful even with audience-members not readily responsive to the material. That effect depends upon the minutely perfect construction which I have analyzed.

It would be easy in analysis made only from reading the play to be misled into identifying the resolving complication as of the same type, with the attack when the idol's steps come to a stop, crisis at Sniggers's exclamation, "We are saved," with a reversal and resolution beginning with the first summons from the idol. In the theatre it is perfectly evident that the audience attention and response are centered on the sustained horror and expectation of the Toff, the exclamations of relief from the other men furnishing a background of irony. There is one reversal beginning when the steps stop, and rising steadily to a climax in the summons to the Toff. In other words, the resolving complication is of the type which rises in a straight line from attack to resolution without a turning point. The swiftness and directness of this kind of movement is needed in *A Night at an Inn* because the crisis of the play is one of very high nervous tension, and the tension of the resolution is also primarily of the nerves. If there were a minor crisis and break following the major crisis, it would be difficult to generate audience tension again for the resolution, and the result would be anti-climax.

The single weakness of the play, the lack of variety and climactic rise in the major succession of complications of the rising action, can be completely offset by skilled production, as has been proved over and over again. It can also trip the unwary or inexperienced director. The mechanical repetition of the three priests stabbed and toppling over like nine-pins easily becomes a comic effect. The dramatist has supplied variation in the procedure leading up to each stabbing, the director must see to it that the death of each priest varies. He must also take full advantage of the leads in the play itself for quickening the tempo from complication to complication to give all the climactic effect possible.

It is no weakness in the play, but a problem for the director, that the crisis depends upon a physical, to a degree mechanical, effect. Of the several productions of *A Night at an Inn* I have seen, all were successful but one. That one failed because the appearance of the idol was unsatisfactory, and the audience laughed at its entrance. The idol must come up to the expectation created by the preparation for its entrance. The sound of the footsteps—remember the idol is huge and of jade—weighty and measured as approaching fate, utterly unhuman and mysterious, can be infinitely terrifying. With a well-devised idol-costume and skilful acting, the groping of the blind thing until it recovers its eye can be extremely horrible. One detail of Lord Dunsany's directions had better be disregarded—"screws it into a socket in the forehead." That of course suggests a small red electric light bulb for the ruby, and a socket to receive it. The process of screwing it in is too suggestive of exactly what is being used, a light bulb, and breaks the illusion. So mechanical a process has an incongruity anyway which tends towards laughter. The ruby can be fixed mysteriously in the eye-socket by using a Christmas-tree ornament or one of the little glass balls obtainable at the ten-cent stores for table decoration, and a wad of freshly chewed gum in the socket.

The last line before the fall of the curtain, "I did not foresee it," is a good example of how important a function there may be for a conclusion beyond the point of resolution. Literally, the line and the resolution overlap, as the Toff's fate closes with his exit; the curtain line, however, is a commentary on the resolution, not a part of it. The Toff's realization at the end of the limitations of human foresight and cleverness, and his perception of "the pride that goeth before a fall" in himself as involved in the causation of his fate, lift the fantastic conclusion of a simple melodramatic story into solemnity and symbolic meaning. This effect could not be achieved by the mere device of a curtain line; the preparation for the significance of the line is an integral part of the skilful construction of the play. Exactly the right line was necessary, however, to clinch the meaning and the mood of the play.

V. ANALYSIS OF A GREAT PLAY

RIDERS TO THE SEA, by John Millington Synge, has been called the greatest one-act play ever written. Certainly within its few pages it achieves an effect of magnitude that is exceedingly rare in the one-act form. In its twenty-minute space in the theatre one seems to have been living timelessly with the slow rhythm of a beautiful Irish folk-speech, and the sound of beating waves and a rising wind outside forever in the ears.

The construction of *Riders to the Sea* is more subtle, the skeleton less obvious, than that of *A Night at an Inn*, which we analyzed in the preceding chapter. The construction of *A Night at an Inn* is a well-built mechanism, but somewhat too mechanical, which is one of the reasons it is a good rather than a great play. Even an uncritical member of the audience *may* become aware of the construction as something built by the dramatist. In *Riders to the Sea* the construction and life of the play are completely one, as bone and tissue grow together in the development of a living organism. For this reason, analysis of structure is more difficult than for *A Night at an Inn*.

Synge was born in 1871 and it was in 1904 that he wrote his second play, *Riders to the Sea*. He had studied music, traveled on the Continent and lived in Paris, and had done some writing. The Irish dramatic movement which became the Abbey Theatre, and the influence of Yeats turned him to drama as a form and to the folk material of his native Ireland for content. In this field his genius found its true expression in the few years before his death in 1909. The Aran Islands are three small islands lying about thirty miles off the west coast of Ireland. They are bare of trees, rocky, storm-swept. The islanders live by fishing, kelp gathering, and small farming, with few contacts with the outside world

until very recently, their lives inextricably bound with the fatality of the sea. In several visits of considerable duration Synge lived with the Aran Islanders and was received as one of them, although they are usually reserved with outsiders. His book, *The Aran Islands*, is a record of his sojourns there and a masterpiece of English prose. It throws much light on the background of *Riders to the Sea*, but one of the achievements of the play for its shortness and unfamiliar background is its self-sufficiency. The play creates its own background in clarity as it goes along without a line of obvious exposition.

Synge found the people possessed of a simple dignity and their songs and stories "beautiful poetry that is filled with the oldest passions of the world." He wrote of the cottage in which he lived: "The kitchen itself, where I will spend most of my time, is full of beauty and distinction. The red dresses of the women who cluster round the fire on their stools give a glow of almost Eastern richness, and the walls have been toned by the turf-smoke to a soft brown that blends with the gray earth-color of the floor. Many sorts of fishing-tackle, and the nets and oilskins of the men, are hung up on the walls or among the open rafters." It is just such a scene on which *Riders to the Sea* opens, and for the setting outside the cottage another passage is illustrative: "A week of smoking fog has passed over and gives me a strange sense of exile and desolation. I walk round the island nearly every day, yet I can see nothing anywhere but a mass of wet rock, a strip of turf, and then a tumult of waves."

The incident of Michael in the play was suggested to Synge by a tale he heard of a man whose body was washed up on a distant coast and identified by the clothes as from the Aran Islands. The manner of the death of Bartley was suggested by another tale of a dead man seen on a horse, understood as a portent. The element of mysticism in the play, the belief in portents and the power of an unlucky word of Maurya and the girls, is an integral part of the lives of the Aran Islanders. The essential quality and bearing on the play of the sentiment for clean, that is new, boards for a coffin and a deep grave need no outside illustration, but it

is interesting to remember from Synge's account that, the islands being devoid of trees, boards had to be brought over at risk and cost from the mainland and every piece of board on the islands was cherished and used over and over. The islands are so rocky with such scant ground for burial that one grave is often above another, or several, and a fresh grave dug through older graves. A deep grave insures against disturbance of the bones. Strong feeling for dignity of burial is characteristic of primitive people whose lives are meagre and for whom the one certainty is death.

Among such people, as Synge related, the interests and powerful emotions of life are centered about the home and family relations, but so hazardous is life for the men that maternal feeling is a torment among them. He wrote that the crying and lamenting of the Aran Islanders at each burial seemed to be not the grief of the single occasion but to give voice to the accumulated sorrow of a people. Most of the people have never known of any other way of life, and the hazards of the sea are taken matter-of-factly as the business of life; death is faced in a spirit of passive fatalism. Maurya is exceptional in her rebellion; in the brooding inactivity of old age she has developed imagination, and by the movement of her mind in the resolution of the play we realize that her imagination beyond the ordinary is the expression of greatness of soul. That is really the genesis of the drama. The "if" which Synge's imagination introduced into a typical situation was a character not wholly typical, and the distinctive quality of an exceptional character releases the significance of the events. The girls in their youth furnish the background of typical matter-of-factness concerning Bartley's journey. Bartley himself has something of his mother's imagination. He accepts the risks of the daily business of life with outward matter-of-factness as a man should, but in a mood touched with sombreness so soon after the death of his last brother and realization of his own responsibility. His awareness adds tragic pathos and dignity to his death.

Like *A Night at an Inn*, Synge's play has the advantage for early concentrated study of eliminating influence toward imitation by its remoteness of setting and speech.

TEXT AND ANALYSIS
of
RIDERS TO THE SEA

By John Millington Synge

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RIDERS TO THE SEA

By John Millington Synge

CHARACTERS

MAURYA, *an old woman.*

BARTLEY, *her son.*

CATHLEEN, *her daughter.*

NORA, *a younger daughter.*

MEN AND WOMEN.

SCENE.—*An Island off the West of Ireland.*

⁽¹⁾*Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. CATHLEEN, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel.* ⁽²⁾*NORA, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.*

NORA [*in a low voice*]. Where is she?

CATHLEEN. She's lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she's able. [*NORA comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.*]⁽²⁾

⁽³⁾CATHLEEN [*spinning the wheel rapidly*]. What is it you have?

NORA. The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal. [*CATHLEEN stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.*]⁽³⁾

⁽⁴⁾NORA. We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.⁽⁴⁾

CATHLEEN. How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA. The young priest says he's known the like of it. ⁽⁵⁾"If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial by the grace of God,"⁽⁵⁾ and if they're

RIDERS TO THE SEA

ANALYSIS

As for A Night at an Inn, it is to be hoped that this play will be read once uncritically for the direct impact, and that the reader will then make his own analysis before studying the author's commentary.

(1) The quiet opening of domestic activity establishes at once the mood of the play and background of the theme of maternal feeling. In the primitive life of the Aran Islands family activity and sentiments cluster about the hearth.

(2) Nora's looking in at the door before entering, her low voice, and question, and her action with the bundle all immediately create question, added to by Cathleen's reply. Who is the person off-stage? What is troubling her? Why does Nora not want her in the kitchen? What is in the bundle?

(3) Cathleen's continued rapid spinning of the wheel and sudden stop at Nora's answer concerning the bundle emphasizes suspense. Nora's speech introduces an aspect of the theme, the constant concern with drowned men.

(4) Introduces the Michael question: are the clothes Michael's, to which is immediately attached the question, has Michael received burial? Instead of complication following complication in simple sequence, as in *A Night at an Inn*, the Michael question and the major dramatic question concerning Bartley have a counter-point relation until the crisis of the play. The first functions of the Michael question are to create introductory suspense and to develop the background of the Bartley question.

(5) Introduction of the feeling for burial.

not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."⁽⁶⁾ [*The door which NORA half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.*]⁽⁷⁾

CATHLEEN [*looking out anxiously*]. Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?⁽⁸⁾

NORA. "I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."⁽⁹⁾

⁽¹⁰⁾CATHLEEN. Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA. Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind.⁽¹⁰⁾ ⁽¹¹⁾[*She goes over to the table with the bundle.*] Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN. Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done.⁽¹¹⁾ [*Coming to the table.*] It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.⁽¹²⁾

NORA [*goes to the inner door and listens*]. She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.⁽¹³⁾

CATHLEEN. Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east. [*They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; CATHLEEN goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. MAURYA comes from the inner room.*]⁽¹⁴⁾

MAURYA [*looking up at CATHLEEN and speaking querulously*]. Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

⁽¹⁵⁾CATHLEEN. There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space [*throwing down the turf*] and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara. [*NORA picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.*]⁽¹⁵⁾

MAURYA [*sitting down on a stool at the fire*]. He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.⁽¹⁶⁾

(6) Introductory building of the mood and theme of the play. Suggests relation between Maurya and Michael and explains the secretiveness about the bundle.

(7) The unseen setting outside the cottage is important; consciousness of it is introduced here, and local color.

(8) Introduces the question, will Bartley go on this day to the fair, and prepares for the conflict between Maurya and Bartley, the introductory question through which the play rises to the attack.

(9) Has irony, in retrospect from the end of the play. Maurya goes beyond this easy faith and comfort. Introduces the relation of Bartley to Maurya, the "last son" theme which adds force to the situation throughout, and the suspense of danger.

(10) Setting outside, and explains and intensifies the Bartley question.

(11) Return to the Michael question in the secondary question, will there be opportunity to examine the bundle without interruption from Maurya? Maurya's coming is a complication which changes the question to, will she discover the bundle before it can be hidden?

(12) The theme of lamentation.

(13) Immediate preparation for an entrance which keeps it from appearing mechanical, but also a part of suspense.

(14) The entrance of the protagonist has been withheld and prepared for by preceding references. Her entrance interrupts the Michael question, but the question of whether she will discover the bundle runs through the next two speeches.

(15) Introducing the Bartley question with Maurya on the stage. Preparation of calling attention to the cake, to function dramatically later.

(16) Question of whether Bartley will go or not again.

NORA. He'll not stop him, mother, and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA. Where is he itself?

⁽¹⁷⁾NORA. He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN. I hear someone passing the big stones.

NORA [*looking out*]. He's coming now, and he in a hurry.⁽¹⁷⁾

BARTLEY [*comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly*].⁽¹⁸⁾ Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN [*coming down*]. Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards.⁽¹⁹⁾ I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.⁽²⁰⁾

NORA [*giving him a rope*]. Is that it, Bartley?

⁽²¹⁾MAURYA. You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. [BARTLEY *takes the rope*.] It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God.⁽²¹⁾

BARTLEY [*beginning to work with the rope*]. I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below.⁽²²⁾

MAURYA. It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara. [*She looks round at the boards*.]

⁽²³⁾BARTLEY. How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?⁽²³⁾

MAURYA. If it wasn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it ris-

(17) Prepares for early entrance of Bartley, and then for immediate entrance. Prepares also for the view of the green head from the window, used later, and for sound on the big stones used later. Adds to outside setting.

(18) Interest in Bartley, as for Maurya, created by references before entrance. All the women have been on-stage before Bartley appears, and his period on-stage is brief; the theme of the play is the reaction upon the women within of the life of the men outside. The stage direction indicates Bartley's mood which the actor must convey as an overtone to the matter-of-factness of what he says.

(19) The new boards called attention to; they are significant later. Here, with the new rope, they serve to reintroduce the Michael question, and the subject of Michael leads into the question of Bartley's going.

(20) Local color, and a sense of reality gained by such casual allusions to details of the daily life of the characters.

(21) Attack of the complication of Maurya's opposition to Bartley's going. The Michael question kept before the audience, and the thematic background of the play built up.

(22) Bartley's matter-of-fact facing the daily life.

(23) The outside setting.

ing in the night. ⁽²⁴⁾If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only? ⁽²⁴⁾

BARTLEY [*working at the halter, to CATHLEEN*]. ⁽²⁵⁾Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA. How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

BARTLEY [*to CATHLEEN*]. If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. ⁽²⁶⁾It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work. ⁽²⁶⁾

MAURYA. It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drown'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave? ⁽²⁷⁾
[BARTLEY *lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.*]

BARTLEY [*to NORA*]. Is she coming to the pier?

NORA [*looking out*]. She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails. ⁽²⁸⁾

BARTLEY [*getting his purse and tobacco*]. I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

MAURYA [*turning round to the fire, and putting her shawl over her head*]. Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

⁽²⁹⁾CATHLEEN. It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over? ⁽²⁹⁾

BARTLEY [*taking the halter*]. I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the gray pony'll run behind me. ⁽³⁰⁾ . . . The blessing of God on you. [*He goes out.*] ⁽³¹⁾

⁽³²⁾MAURYA [*crying out as he is in the door*]. He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

CATHLEEN. Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is

(24) The first shade of mysticism in this half-superstitious weather sign. Then the "one son only" theme, and the voicing in Maurya of the racial protest of motherhood.

(25) Local color and sense of reality in concrete specific details. In Maurya's grumbling remark on a young girl's inexperience a touch of the homely reality combined with tragic dignity for the character.

(26) The "last son" theme and Bartley's poignant realization of his lonely responsibility. Not one line of the play thus far can be labeled readily as exposition. Every sentence, like this of Bartley's, seems to come inevitably with the action and emotion. Yet the audience has gradually learned that Michael was Maurya's son and nine days ago was reported drowned, and that Bartley is the only son remaining. In this line, apparently casually, we learn for certain what the situation in its various details has prepared us for, that the father is dead. It is not stated directly, but revealed to the audience as by accident. We have also learned the place the sea holds in the lives of these people, and their strong feeling about burial.

(27) The practical consideration in Maurya's lamentation does not detract from the purity of the sentiment of motherhood, but in the primitive background takes it back to its profound depths in close integration with life.

(28) The outside setting, and preparation for Nora's seeing Bartley passing the green head from the window.

(29) The youthful lack of imagination of the girls.

(30) Preparation for the dramatic function of the gray pony later.

(31) *Attack* of the play, the resolution of the introductory question whether Bartley will go or not. *Major dramatic question*: will Bartley be drowned and Maurya left with no son?

(32) First complication of rising action, the double hindrance of no blessing and an unlucky word. The question of whether this bad luck will fall is not answered until the crisis of the play; other complications arise and are resolved between, while the feeling of fatality upon Bartley's journey accumulates with the complication of Maurya's vision of Michael.

on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?⁽³²⁾
⁽³³⁾[MAURYA *takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.*]

NORA [*turning toward her*]. You're taking away the turf from the cake.⁽³³⁾

⁽³⁴⁾CATHLEEN [*crying out*]. The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread. [*She comes over to the fire.*]

NORA. And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

CATHLEEN [*turning the cake out of the oven*]. It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking forever. [*MAURYA sways herself on her stool.*]⁽³⁴⁾

⁽³⁵⁾CATHLEEN [*cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to MAURYA*]. Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.⁽³⁵⁾

MAURYA [*taking the bread*]. Will I be in it as soon as himself?

CATHLEEN. If you go now quickly.

MAURYA [*standing up unsteadily*]. It's hard set I am to walk.

⁽³⁶⁾CATHLEEN [*looking at her anxiously*]. Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA. What stick?

CATHLEEN. The stick Michael brought from Conne-mara.⁽³⁶⁾

⁽³⁷⁾MAURYA [*taking a stick NORA gives her*]. In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.⁽³⁷⁾ [*She goes out slowly.*]⁽³⁸⁾ NORA goes over to the ladder.]

CATHLEEN. Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

NORA. Is she gone round by the bush?

(33) Casual accidental action leads to a new complication.

(34) Introduction of second complication, Bartley without his bread.

(35) Attack of second complication: question, will Maurya get the bread to Bartley? Creates immediately the attack of a third complication, a furtherance: question, will Maurya reach Bartley with her blessing and break the bad luck? The two complications progress simultaneously.

(36) Introduces Michael again.

(37) Thematic background for mood of play, and imagination of Maurya.

(38) Return to the Michael question, with the minor suspense of possibility of interruption from Maurya reinforcing the suspense of identifying the clothes. The Michael theme serves here to fill a rather long stage interval in which there is no further development on the Bartley question. The material is completely functional dramatically; suspense is sustained by the secondary dramatic question, the thematic background and mood of the play are developed, and realization of the danger by sea to Bartley is intensified.

CATHLEEN [*looking out*]. She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.⁽³⁸⁾

NORA [*getting the bundle from the loft*]. The young priest said he'd be passing tomorrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

CATHLEEN [*taking the bundle*]. Did he say what way they were found?

NORA [*coming down*]. "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."⁽³⁹⁾

⁽⁴⁰⁾CATHLEEN [*trying to open the bundle*]. Give me a knife, Nora, the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

NORA [*giving her a knife*]. I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN [*cutting the string*]. It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be seven days you'd be in Donegal.

NORA. And what time would a man take, and he floating?⁽⁴⁰⁾ [CATHLEEN *opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a stocking. They look at them eagerly.*]⁽⁴¹⁾

CATHLEEN [*in a low voice*]. The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

⁽⁴²⁾NORA. I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other. [*She looks through some clothes hanging in the corner.*] It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

CATHLEEN. I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it. [*Pointing to the corner.*] There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do. [NORA *brings it to her and they compare the flannel.*]

CATHLEEN. It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?⁽⁴²⁾

(39) The word "black" occurs so frequently as to add to the atmosphere and setting. Maurya spoke of the "black night falling" just after Bartley's exit; here are "black cliffs" and "black knot" in quick succession, and "black hags" (a sea bird, the cormorant or the sooty shearwater) a little further on.

(40) The interval for the stage business of getting the bundle open builds up suspense. The dialogue which covers the interval is well timed to the stage business.

(41) Attack for the rising movement to identification.

(42) Further complications in the process of identification intensify suspense.

⁽⁴³⁾NORA [*who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out*]. ⁽⁴⁴⁾It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

CATHLEEN [*taking the stocking*]. It's a plain stocking.

NORA. It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

CATHLEEN [*counts the stitches*]. It's that number is in it. ⁽⁴⁴⁾ ⁽⁴⁵⁾[*Crying out*]. Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

NORA [*swinging herself round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes*]. And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking? ⁽⁴⁵⁾

⁽⁴⁶⁾CATHLEEN [*after an instant*]. Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

NORA [*looking out*]. She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

CATHLEEN. Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

NORA [*helping CATHLEEN to close the bundle*]. We'll put them here in the corner. [*They put them into a hole in the chimney corner. CATHLEEN goes back to the spinning-wheel.*]

NORA. Will she see it was crying I was?

CATHLEEN. Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ [*NORA sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door.* ⁽⁴⁷⁾MAURYA comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and NORA points to the bundle of bread.]

CATHLEEN [*after spinning for a moment*]. You didn't give him his bit of bread? [*MAURYA begins to keen softly, without turning round.*]

(43) Crisis of complication of identification.

(44) Resolution of identification complication, the crisis, however, of the whole movement of the Michael theme, which begins and ends with the question of effect on Maurya. Identification of the clothes is immediately related here to Maurya and to suspense of the Bartley question. Tension of the identification is increased by elaboration of detail of the knitting. Pathos in the homely and minute details.

(45) The lamentation theme. Tragic pathos in descent from "a great rower and fisher" to "a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking." These two speeches are a conclusion after the resolution of the identification complication which points significance, develops the mood, and adds dignity.

(46) The identification complication has been resolved, and the Michael question immediately reverts to the question of effect on Maurya. Suspense is sustained by the quick return of the complication of concealment from Maurya. Maurya's entrance is prepared for by this complication and given dramatic tension, and the question of her blessing to Bartley reintroduced.

(47) Maurya's entrance returns the play to the Bartley question. First, the secondary question of getting the bread to him is answered in the negative by Maurya's still having the cake; from that and her strange conduct, arises the question, did she see Bartley at all, and by implication, did she give him her blessing and remove the bad luck? Introductory suspense built for the new question, what did Maurya see?

CATHLEEN. Did you see him riding down? [MAURYA goes on keening.]

CATHLEEN [*a little impatiently*]. God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you.

MAURYA [*with a weak voice*]. My heart's broken from this day.⁽⁴⁷⁾

CATHLEEN [*as before*]. Did you see Bartley?

⁽⁴⁸⁾MAURYA. I seen the fearfulest thing.

⁽⁴⁹⁾CATHLEEN [*leaves her wheel and looks out*]. God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the gray pony behind him.

MAURYA [*starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice*]. The gray pony behind him.

CATHLEEN [*coming to the fire*]. What is it ails you, at all?

⁽⁵⁰⁾MAURYA [*speaking very slowly*]. I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

CATHLEEN and NORA. Uah. [*They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.*]

NORA. Tell us what it is you seen.⁽⁵⁰⁾

MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the gray pony behind him. [*She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.*] The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN. What is it you seen?

⁽⁵¹⁾MAURYA. I seen Michael himself.

CATHLEEN [*speaking softly*]. You did not, mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial by the grace of God.

MAURYA [*a little defiantly*]. I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "The blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say noth-

(48) Attack of the new complication of the portent, from which the action rises again to the crisis after the interval of the Michael question. The question of Maurya's blessing to Bartley is held in suspension for this new question of what Maurya saw, and then merged with it. The negative resolution of the complication of the blessing is the crisis of the complication of what Maurya saw.

(49) Complication and suspense for the question of what Maurya saw. Cathleen's view from the window, and the mare and gray pony, were well prepared for earlier in the play.

(50) Immediate recognition by the girls of a portent increases tension.

(51) The question of Maurya's blessing to Bartley is resolved by Maurya's inability to speak, and is the crisis of the portent, resolved in the vision of Michael. Before Maurya sees Michael, the power of the doom upon Bartley is present and prevents her from saying, "God speed you." The Michael theme, through the portent, becomes the crucial complication in the development of the major dramatic question concerning Bartley's fate.

ing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.⁽⁵¹⁾

⁽⁵²⁾CATHLEEN [*begins to keen*]. It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

NORA. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God wouldn't leave her destitute with no son living?

⁽⁵³⁾MAUYRA [*in a low voice, but clearly*]. It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. . . . There were Stephen, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on the one plank, and in by that door.⁽⁵³⁾ [*She pauses for a moment, (54) the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.*]

NORA [*in a whisper*]. Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the northeast?

CATHLEEN [*in a whisper*]. There's someone after crying out by the seashore.⁽⁵⁴⁾

⁽⁵⁵⁾MAURYA [*continues without hearing anything*]. There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door. [*She pauses again with her hand stretched out toward the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneel-*

(52) Cathleen's response to the portent impresses its fatality.

(53) The external action of *Riders to the Sea* is simple and requires few details of exposition of immediate situation or antecedent material. Those details were developed gradually in the introduction preceding the attack. A great deal of antecedent material is needed to develop the mood of the play, to give it the breadth and intensity of tragic dignity, and to develop the character action in Maurya. This exposition, essentially the number of strong men taken by the sea from this household, is packed into the play in Maurya's lament immediately preceding the crisis. The bare fact is broadened by the intimate details upon which Maurya dwells, and given the dignity of Maurya's great imagination. The exposition is completely dramatic, first, because it is the expression of the powerful emotion of a character in response to the action of the play, and secondly, because it is itself an act, a part of the progression toward the resolution. From her vision, Maurya believes in Bartley's death, although she does not foresee the exact manner and immediacy of his drowning. Her lament is a purging of her mind in preparation for her final resignation. The magnificent monody also lifts the mood of the audience for reception of the crisis.

(54) Prepares for the entrance of the old women, the attack of the final rise to the crisis, and creates a new suspense held through the conclusion of Maurya's lament.

(55) Maurya's speech rises to the intensity of mystic second sight. The concluding details and Maurya's gesture grip the audience with a sense of the prophetic which gives a hushed solemnity to the immediate reenactment of those details.

ing down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.](⁽⁵⁵⁾

⁽⁵⁶⁾MAURYA [*half in a dream, to CATHLEEN*]. Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

CATHLEEN. Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

MAURYA. There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was it.

CATHLEEN. It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north. [*She reaches out and hands MAURYA the clothes that belonged to MICHAEL. MAURYA stands up slowly, and takes them in her hands.*]⁽⁵⁶⁾ NORA looks out.]

NORA. They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

⁽⁵⁷⁾CATHLEEN [*in a whisper to the women who have come in*]. Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. It is surely, God rest his soul. [*Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of BARTLEY, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.*]⁽⁵⁷⁾

⁽⁵⁸⁾CATHLEEN [*to the women, as they are doing so*]. What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. The gray pony knocked him into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.⁽⁵⁸⁾ ⁽⁵⁹⁾[MAURYA has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. CATHLEEN and NORA kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.]

MAURYA [*raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her*]. They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me.⁽⁵⁹⁾ . . . ⁽⁶⁰⁾I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the

(56) The last entrance of the Michael theme. The first complication in the Michael theme, from the opening lines of the play, was concealment from Maurya, resolved at this point. The Michael theme functions here to fill the necessary interval for Bartley's body to be carried to the cottage, an interval which helps to maintain the slow tempo of this part of the play and intensifies suspense. The Michael theme reached its peak at the identification of his clothes, and in its resolution subsides to secondary place before the Bartley theme.

(57) *Crisis of the play.*

(58) The manner of Bartley's drowning has the appearance of an accident and not the consequence of his going to the fair on a day of expected storm. The accident is the device by which Synge has compressed the action into the brief and continuous time-period. Like every other technical device in the play, however, it is part of an organic unity. The accident is integrated with Maurya's foreboding and mystic sense of the fatality of the sea, and her prophetic vision. By this means, Synge achieves the tragic inevitability and magnitude of effect of fate embodied in the sea. If Bartley had been drowned in storm at sea, the conclusion would be without repose; the protest, if only Bartley had not gone this day, would remain. As it is, the feeling is that of inescapable doom.

(59) In the familiar rites of death the ceremonial beauty and dignity of a temple enters the simple scene. Against the background Maurya moves and speaks in the isolation of her sorrow, finding her way alone to the final resolution of her spirit.

(60) The outside setting in its complete pervasion of the life within the cottage.

east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other.⁽⁶⁰⁾ ⁽⁶¹⁾I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. [*To NORA.*] Give me the Holy Water, Nora, there's a small sup still on the dresser. [*NORA gives it to her.*]

MAURYA [*drops MICHAEL's clothes across BARTLEY's feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him*]. It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking.⁽⁶¹⁾ [*She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.*]

⁽⁶²⁾CATHLEEN [*to an old man*]. Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

THE OLD MAN [*looking at the boards*]. Are there nails with them?

CATHLEEN. There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

ANOTHER MAN. It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

CATHLEEN. It's getting old she is, and broken. [*MAURYA stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of MICHAEL's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.*]

NORA [*in a whisper to CATHLEEN*]. She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would anyone have thought that?

CATHLEEN [*slowly and clearly*]. An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days

(61) The lower level of Maurya's resignation, negative and self-centered, merely the release from pain of sleep or death.

(62) In isolation, behind this interval of the more superficial relations to death of people less nearly touched and of less imagination, Maurya struggles through the negative resolution of peace and rises to the positive resolution.

herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?⁽⁶²⁾

⁽⁶³⁾MAURYA [*puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on BARTLEY's feet*]. They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn [*bending her head*]; and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is left living in the world.⁽⁶³⁾ [*She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.*]

⁽⁶⁴⁾MAURYA [*continuing*]. Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied. [*She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.*]

(63) "They're all together this time, and the end is come" is the utterance of peace. The ways of God are immutable and Maurya has been helpless before the fate upon her sons; she will do faithfully what lies in her power for them, and utters the prayer for the soul of each of her six sons. But that is not the end between Maurya and her sons, for out of her own great and overwhelming grief comes an expansion of consciousness into identification with all the grief in the world: "May He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is left living in the world." *That is the resolution of the play.*

(64) After the exaltation of spiritual imagination of the resolution, Maurya subsides to a concluding mood of peace—for herself, she will be satisfied. The former peace of rest from pain was negative; this peace of acceptance of what life has granted is positive.

With another protagonist than Maurya, a lesser character, the same external plot could have produced a complete action with a few lines conveying grief after the body of Bartley is carried in. The vision of Michael would then have been the crisis and Bartley's death the resolution. But with Maurya, the vision of Michael and prophetic belief in Bartley's death starts an action *within* her consciousness which is not resolved by the death of Bartley but precipitated into its final movement. Confronted by the absolute and final fact of Bartley's death when life has done all that it can to her, her lament turns to an assertion of her own greatness of heart. It is this last movement which gives the play its breadth and greatness. The resolution is not something superimposed upon the play, but is inherent in the superior imagination and will of Maurya which produces her rebellion in the beginning. The major dramatic question appears first to the minds of the audience as whether Bartley will return safely or be drowned. At the crisis it is, what will be the effect on Maurya? The change is not abrupt but an organic growth. The play opens on the question of effect on Maurya

of Michael's drowning, before Bartley is mentioned, so that the question of effect on Maurya if Bartley is drowned is latent from the beginning. It grows in her opposition to Bartley's going and throughout the development of the Michael theme. At first it is a question of effect *upon* her. As her character is revealed in interest and magnitude through her lament after the vision of Michael, the question becomes one of effect *within* her, and is poised in this form in the minds of the audience ready for release at the death of Bartley.

The shift of emphasis from plot to character in the major dramatic question at the crisis is frequent in the higher genres of drama. The construction of *Riders to the Sea* is unusual in that the major character response to the crucial event actually begins before the event occurs and moves through it, receiving its final impetus from the crisis. This structure is achieved by the foreshadowing of the death of Bartley in Maurya's vision of Michael following him on the gray pony. Without the preparation before the crisis so major a development of character would not be convincing in a short play. Also, the review in Maurya's lament of the death of the other men of her household enables us to feel the whole movement of her life leading up to its final crisis.

It must always be remembered in the structural analysis of plays that we are doing what the anatomist does. With a play on the dissecting table we are acquiring knowledge of the structures through which plays operate and perform the functions of life. But back of the structure is the mysterious principle of life itself, the origin of which for a play is in the mind of the author. In organic life the character does not create the function, but the function the structure. A perfectly functioning organism is the product of an evolutionary process of selection and survival of the fittest. Various forms arise: some are unsuited to function and are discarded; by trial and error the forms adjusted to function are found and preserved. In such manner the mind of the author of a play throws off many forms. By a process of selection, discard and acceptance, the play advances through revision, mental and on paper, conscious and unconscious, to

its perfect functional form. In the organic evolution of nature, the process may or may not be blind; that is a question of theology. But we know that a play is created by a conscious agent. The magnitude of function of a play is determined by the magnitude of mind of its author. Analysis of the construction of a great play is not an analysis of its greatness, although in the intricacy and delicate adjustment of the parts of such a play we may glimpse indirectly the wonder of the determining function. So the anatomist may be filled with marvel and awe for the principle of life.

Riders to the Sea is a great play because of the magnitude of its content; not because it is perfectly written. The magnitude of content, however, cannot exist except in perfect execution. A list of the qualities which make *Riders to the Sea* a great play must start with content and progress to realization of content in form.

1. *Largeness of theme*, transcending race and class. The individual and particular story of Maurya trying to keep her son Bartley from the peril of one journey by sea is realized as an embodiment of the struggle of the maternal passion in a people against the sea. Maternal passion is one of those "oldest passions in the world," which Synge wrote that he found in the songs and stories of the Aran Islands. The sea itself is also felt in *Riders to the Sea* as the embodiment of all the power in the universe beyond human control, and Synge's play takes its place with the great Greek tragedies as an expression of the consciousness of fate and the power of the human spirit to transcend what it cannot avert. In Greek tragedy and in Elizabethan, it was the rule for the protagonist to be given high station in life for the sake of dignity and magnitude of effect. In modern drama, with the democratic sense of the dignity and unity of man, the protagonist may be of humble station, as Maurya, and be felt to embody the breadth of humanity itself.

2. *Tragic beauty*, the harmonizing of conflicting elements. There are conflicts which are resolved by the defeat of one force by another. The most ultimate conflict, that between the doom of inevitable pain in life and man's demand for happiness, cannot be so resolved. Something higher than

happiness, a harmony of consciousness in which the mind accepts the pain and transcends it, can be achieved. This is the material of tragedy.

3. *Conviction of reality* to the audience. The theme of a drama is abstract, it must be presented convincingly to the audience as a concrete reality of human life. This effect in *Riders to the Sea* is achieved by the two following characteristics, 4 and 5.

4. *Intense localization*. While the underlying theme seems true to all men, it is conveyed with minute and exact truth to a specific background. In *Riders to the Sea* the details are those of realistic local color, but the localization of a drama may lie in truth to a world which derives its local color from the imagination of the artist, as in fantasy or romance.

5. *Completeness of characterization*, or psychological localization. The character of Maurya has the reality and interest of complexity, magnitude, and growth. Interest is centered on the effect of events on the character.

6. *Simplicity and restraint*. This is a matter of proportion between the magnitude of the events and the attitude of the artist. In the execution of *Riders to the Sea* one feels the artist quiet, awed, before his subject. Extravagance of expression and means by the artist shows lack of confidence in his subject. Expression which labors above the subject excites contempt for both.

7. *Economy*. The maximum effect for the minimum of means is one of the measures of art. By intensive selection and arrangement for compression of structure and dialogue, Synge has achieved through suggestion an extraordinary scope of effect in proportion to the length of the play.

8. *Unity* of form and language with subject. A necessary part of the tragic beauty of harmonization of conflicting elements in content is a harmony of form which reveals the order and control of those elements in the mind of the artist.

9. *Technique*, that is, perfect construction and much good theatre. Construction is the aspect of the play analyzed in the running comment, the selection and arrangement of the material in adjustment to the principles of audience attention, without which, whatever may be in the mind of the

dramatist, it cannot be communicated effectively to an audience. "Good theatre" is a phrase used for those features of drama which intrinsically appeal to an audience independently of the relation to the drama. The phrase is sometimes used as a term of contempt, but good theatre which is employed not only as a means to audience attention, but at the same time as a means of expression, in other words, which is integrated with the content, is a part of every successful drama. In *Riders to the Sea* the picturesque elements of the beauty of setting, as indicated by Synge's description in *The Aran Islands* of a scene such as he had in mind, and of the ceremonial background of the crisis and resolution, are examples of such integrated good theatre. Similarly, the construction is so unified with content that it was impossible to analyze the construction without frequent introduction of the elements of greatness in content.

10. *Distinction and beauty of language.* The poetic beauty of the language of *Riders to the Sea* is based upon the inherent beauty of the folk-speech of the Aran Islanders, which impressed Synge and stirred his imagination, and of which he gives examples in *The Aran Islands*. That beauty is enhanced by Synge's own style and cultivated ear, as readily can be seen by comparing examples of the folk-speech quoted by Synge with passages in the play. The beauty of language of *Riders to the Sea* is in part the sensuous beauty of harmonies and rhythms pleasing to the ear, but above this, it has significant beauty, it is expressive of the content. In its slow and regular rhythm it suggests the sea and the long-enduring relation between the sea and a people; and in its rich harmonies it suggests their profound response. For myself, I can never read or hear the first movement of Maurya's lament, beginning, "It's little the like of him knows of the sea," without a tingle of nerves and emotion. The sheer power of language creates one of the dramatic heights of the play. The full beauty of the language of *Riders to the Sea* can, perhaps, be perfectly realized only from the richly modulated and controlled voices of the Abbey Players.

A play is a good or a great play according to the magnitude of its content, and each is a successful play according

to its execution. The beginning dramatist need not concern himself with whether he has a great play to offer or not. There are only a few such in the world, too few, but there are also too few good plays. Let the beginning dramatist aim at making his play *interesting* by skilful control of his material in accordance with the laws of attention for a dramatic conflict; *sincere*, true to the life he presents as he sees it and feels it, not merely a mechanical construction on the principles of attention; and *not shoddy*, offering the quality of his own mind, the best he has, with intensity—and the rest is with powers outside his control.

VI. MORE ABOUT ONE-ACT PLAYS

THERE is a norm of dramatic structure. Let no high-sounding notions of the freedom of self-expression, the independence of artistic creation, and the infinite variety of human life divert attention from that fact. Within even the most intricate areas of human life itself, the recesses of the subconscious dealt with by psychiatry, there are norms, or psychiatry would be impossible. Psychiatry, however, is often futile because of too little knowledge, as yet, or disregard of the infinite variations from the norms. The study of dramatic structure should start rigidly and advance to flexibility. People with facility and only a narrow and unimaginative study of dramatic structure can turn out neat, tricky little plays made up of the dry bones of past plays decked out in flimsy garments of a fresh background and characters with at least new names. Such plays may get by before exceedingly unsophisticated audiences or a sophisticated audience that is theatrically relaxed, merely determined to be entertained, having paid its money. In drama of any vitality, the material of every new play will to a degree draw its own form from the imagination of the writer. The thing to remember is the difference between artistic anarchy and variation from a norm.

A very familiar play, *The Valiant* by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass, probably has never impressed an audience as an experimental play or unusual in structure. Yet the play varies somewhat radically from the structural norm of introductory dramatic question, major dramatic question, sharply defined attack, crisis, and resolution, with rising and falling action, of *A Night at an Inn* and *Riders to the Sea*. *The Valiant* is one of the best-proved plays of the amateur theatre. Its variation from the norm grows naturally out of

the material, and the play produces the proper effect of drama in the theatre.

The Valiant opens on a prison Warden and Chaplain, Father Daly, in the Warden's office a little less than an hour before a scheduled execution of a prisoner for murder. They are discussing the condemned man. He has steadfastly refused to give his real name, to admit of any relatives, or to let slip any detail which would lead to his identification. He has written an autobiography for a newspaper for twenty-five hundred dollars, but the Warden is certain it is fictional. The prisoner has bought Liberty Bonds with the money for his story, and has named no one to whom to leave them. He has produced a strangely favorable impression on both men. He had pleaded guilty, but has shown no sign of feeling of guilt, has maintained with equanimity that the murder was deliberate and justified, and he is willing to pay for it with his own life. The Warden and Father Daly are convinced he is concealing his identity to shield his family or friends from shame for him. Thousands of letters have been received from people hoping this young man is the long-lost son, brother, husband, or sweetheart. The Warden and Chaplain are deeply concerned to get the man calling himself James Dyke to reveal his identity in order to relieve the minds of the many inquirers, and out of sympathy for Dyke's self-imposed loneliness before death.

The Warden decides to make an exception to prison rules and have Dyke brought to his office and remain there alone with himself and Father Daly for the short interval before execution, in the hope he will talk. Just after he sends for Dyke a call comes from the Governor that a girl who believes Dyke is her brother has come to him, and if necessary they are to hold off the execution long enough for her to talk with Dyke. The Warden and Father Daly try without success to shake Dyke's resolution not to reveal himself. The Girl is announced. After a brief talk with the Warden she is left alone with Dyke. The Girl's father is dead, her mother is ill and could not come. Her only brother, ten years older than herself, left home eight years before, when she was ten. She realizes she might not be able to recognize

him, but believes she will know if he is her brother by talking of things they used to do together. He wanted to be an actor, and told her the stories of Shakespeare, recited Shakespeare to her, and taught her lines. Most especially, they used to say good-night to each other with the good-night lines from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Dyke convinces the Girl he is not her brother, and that he never had a sister, apparently he never heard of Shakespeare. When he hears her brother's name, he tells her of having seen him die heroically in action in the World War, and to tell her mother that she can be proud of her son. The Girl is happy with this news. Then Dyke is struck by an inspiration, and gives the Girl the Liberty Bonds to take to her mother as a memorial for her son. The Girl wishes there were something she could do to make him even a little happier too. Hesitantly, he asks if she could really say good-bye; he has no sister or anyone to say good-bye to him. She goes to him and kisses him and he kisses her twice on the forehead. The Girl, in her turn, wishes she might say good-bye to him, as now she never can to her brother, with their good-night speech:

Good-night, good-night, parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good-night till it be morrow.

After Juliet's lines she goes out, with a sob, and closes the door. Dyke stands several seconds "rigidly intent upon that door; until at length, without changing his attitude or expression, he speaks very tenderly and reminiscently:

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast;
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest."

From here the play goes on for three pages, with the entrance of the Warden and Father Daly, and the attendant, the announcement of time for the execution, preliminaries on the part of all concerned, and something of a processional exit. Dyke gropes in memory through the lines from *Julius Cæsar* to "The valiant never taste of death but once," and upon that line sustains his march to the scaffold.

The Valiant is built without a crisis, without a rising and falling action. It is all rising action to a climax in Dyke's

response with Romeo's good-night lines after the Girl is gone. Those lines resolve the play at a single stroke. They should end the play, or approximately so.

The attack and major dramatic question are not readily identifiable. On the second page, or in the second minute on the stage, the question is projected, who is James Dyke? and that is the question in a more specific form which is answered in the resolution. The question is assuredly introductory, however, until the Warden announces several minutes later that he is going to talk to Dyke again. Until then the question exists from antecedent conflict, but we do not know that it will be taken up again actively. With the Warden's announcement we know the conflict is coming, but the clash of wills cannot actually operate until Dyke enters. With the foreshadowing of conflict, the question becomes, not who is Dyke, but will Dyke hold out or reveal his identity? There is a great difference: the first question arouses curiosity, but is not dramatic; the second question is dramatic because it involves conflict and will. In the meantime, the Warden's decision to have Dyke brought to his office is a complication which announces the conflict more definitely. Actually, this is simply a device by which to get Dyke on the stage and keep the play in one continuous scene, but the Warden's decision is a completely functional complication. It is misdirected energy to try to fix upon any one of the three points, the Warden will talk to Dyke again, the Warden decides to have Dyke brought to his office, or Dyke's entrance, as the attack. The whole section might be considered the attack, with the complication of the Warden's decision intensifying its form, and the complication of the telephone call from the Governor, within this same space, preparing for the later entrance of the Girl.

There are further difficulties of labeling, however. With the entrance of the Girl, and through her scene with the Warden, the question changes to a much more intense form—is Dyke the Girl's brother? That is the question answered by the resolution. In addition, the struggle for Dyke himself does not become acute until he is confronted by the Girl. The tension of that final scene, although it begins past the

middle of the play, is such as to make all that has preceded seem introductory. The immediately preceding scene between the Girl and the Warden, certainly, is introductory and expository for her scene with Dyke. What it amounts to is that the play plunges almost immediately into the main line of question, and by that means is sustained to a very late introduction of the acute phase of the question. It is sustained, of course, by a steady rise of pressure upon Dyke. Incidentally, there is a great deal of exposition of antecedent material necessary to the play, all worked in dramatically. The details between the Warden and Father Daly build the question, who is Dyke? The details from the Warden to Dyke are the complications creating pressure upon him; the details from the Girl to the Warden build up the question, is Dyke her brother? As exposition, they prepare for the tense moments of waiting for a possible response from Dyke as the Girl projects each detail of childhood recollection at him.

The most important variation from the norm in *The Valiant* is that the question in its final phase, is Dyke the Girl's brother, rather than will he hold out, seems to be again the curiosity question rather than the dramatic question. He never slips once, his manner and everything he says are under perfect control; he finally convinces the Girl, and the audience. Then comes the quick reversal. But half-consciously for the audience the question lives, even for the moment after the Girl's exit; if he *should* be the Girl's brother, can he hold out? It is really that almost subconscious question that is answered by the resolution and which is responsible for the overwhelming depth of feeling which comes to the audience with those transcendently musical and beautiful lines of Shakespeare so appropriate to this new context. I once saw an audience in Houston, Texas, look like a Chautauqua salute at the curtain with the flutter of white handkerchiefs. One man, after dabbing his eyes with his wife's inadequate handkerchief, thrust it across the aisle with averted look to a man who had been going unavailingly through his own pockets. That response is no shock of surprise that the boy is the Girl's brother after all; it is a

mingling of pathos and admiration, the pathos that the Girl a few steps the other side of the door does not know, and wonder for the boy's lonely courage and self-possession even unto the last.

And now the norm again. In the boy's struggle there is a crisis. His supreme moment of final decision of the direction he will take is that moment just after the door closes on the Girl. Her hesitation, her last look, her sob before she hurries through the door accumulate the final pressure upon him. He could still call her back, but he holds on, and not until she is assuredly gone does he release his yearning affection in the tender good-night lines. Often in the compactness of the one-act form the resolution comes almost immediately upon the crisis. Here there is only a silent interval of a few seconds. The audience half-consciously or subconsciously realizes that crisis and experiences the full cycle of dramatic emotion. Consciously, if the curtain is dropped within a few seconds after the resolution, the audience is "getting" the play in its full significance after the curtain. There will be no applause for a long interval.

I have known people to think the play sentimental from reading; I doubt if anyone finds it sentimental in a good production. A play is sentimental when upon retrospect the audience feels that its emotions have been played upon beyond what is justified by the content, or that the emotions pointed to are inappropriate to the content; in other words, that the dramatist has been working to induce emotions instead of creating cause for emotion. If the response of the audience is unaffected even by a subconscious awareness of Dyke's conflict, the emotions aroused are in excess of the apparent situation and inappropriate to the actual situation. For example, the kiss for good-bye. If Dyke had not been the Girl's brother, his yearning for that kiss is exactly what any boy such as he is presented as being might truly have felt. No one should honestly deny that. But such a young man as Dyke would not have expressed the desire. It is because she *is* his sister that he cannot refrain from asking that much. If the audience at that moment are simply thinking Dyke not the Girl's brother, they may well feel the author

is working this up a bit. After the resolution they can think back and say, oh, well, it wasn't really sentimental after all, but obviously one cannot coldly reconstruct his emotions for a play after it is over; he has felt what he has felt. Similarly, if the revelation of Dyke's identity comes simply as a shock, the whole preceding course of emotion is inappropriate to the actual situation because it is all pathos without the admiration due the conflict. The concealment of Dyke's identity is not a trick, but necessary for the audience's identification with the Girl, out of which the pathos is realized with the admiration. The audience is allowed to look in upon the episode and see all that transpires. There is no artificial concealment. They should not suspect that Dyke is the Girl's brother so much as not quite give up hope that he is. A great deal depends upon the actors for exactly the right fine molding of the audience's response.

The conclusion of the play, as written, is sentimental. It shows a lack of confidence in the material to the resolution and an effort to work up a still higher emotional effect by the introduction of "good theatre" independently of the organic demands of what precedes. As a result, the conclusion falls into three errors. First, character is violated: Dyke would not have recited Shakespeare before the Warden and Father Daly, as his knowledge or ignorance of Shakespeare was a crucial point of identification with the Girl's brother and would have given him away. The authors try to cover this by showing the Warden and Father Daly merely perplexed by what Dyke is saying; the Warden had shown more comprehension about Shakespeare than that to the Girl, and Father Daly would know Shakespeare. Secondly, the conclusion raises a new question after the resolution of the play, will Dyke face death unflinching at the last? The conclusion tries to rise to a final and higher climax on that question and its resolution, but the audience has never doubted that Dyke would face death well. He has already faced a harder struggle before the Girl and triumphed. As a result, the conclusion commits the third error of anticlimax. I have seen one production in which the full conclusion was used and it fell flat. In other productions the conclusion was cut

to varying degrees. In the most effective performance there was no word after Dyke's good-night lines. The Warden and Father Daly appeared in one door as the jailer, in obedience to previous instructions, stepped inside the room from another door, the signal that the time for execution had arrived. The curtain fell. That brief business as conclusion conveyed the necessary finality.

Another old stand-by of the amateur theatre, *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell, is one of the finest of one-act plays and an interesting example of variation from the norm within a simple and natural pattern. The protagonist, the person whom the play is really about and whose fate hangs in the balance, never appears on the stage. The play opens with the entrance on a cold winter morning of County Attorney Henderson, Sheriff Peters, Mr. Hale, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale into the kitchen of the empty farmhouse of John Wright. The previous morning Mr. Hale, a neighbor, had called and discovered that John Wright had been strangled in his bed with a rope around his neck. Mrs. Wright had been taken into custody by the Sheriff. The men are here this morning to investigate the murder, the women to gather up some things for Mrs. Wright. The men go about their business, searching in vain for clues to the murder, and tolerantly amused at the trifles which concern the women-folk in the kitchen. Out of these trifles, the women reconstruct the life of another woman, married to a "good" but hard man, through years of cheerless, stifled existence on a lonely farm. The first items, canned fruit that has frozen over night, a dirty towel, bread that had been set for rising, establish identification between the two women and Mrs. Wright. Then comes a block of patchwork for a quilt, the last piece stitched crazily as though by someone who didn't know what she was doing. Mrs. Hale remarks bad sewing worries her, cuts the stitches and resews the piece. Finally an empty canary cage with a broken door is found, and then, wrapped in silk in a little box in the sewing basket, the body of the bird with its neck wrung. John Wright wasn't a man to want a thing singing in the house. Mrs. Wright when she was Minnie Foster used to sing in the choir, was rather like a

bird herself. It must have been awfully still in the house, if one were used to a bird singing and then it stopped.

Early in the play, left alone, the women half-frightenedly ask each other, "Do you think she did it?"—the attack. After the discovery of the dead bird, without saying it in so many words, they communicate their mutual understanding that Mrs. Wright did kill her husband. This is the crisis, not in any one speech, but gradually over a period. The major dramatic question changes to whether or not the women will communicate their discoveries to the men. On the one side, in their minds, is the sense for law, on the other their sympathetic insight into Mrs. Wright's justification. The men come in: it is all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it; if only there were something definite to connect up with the strange manner of murder, he would have a case, says the County Attorney. He doesn't suppose the things the women have gathered up for Mrs. Wright are important, turns them over carelessly. The men go out again for a moment. Mrs. Hale looks at Mrs. Peters. Mrs. Peters tries to hide the box with the bird, is flustered. The men are heard returning. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat.

The attack, crisis, and resolution are definite. The major dramatic question, however, is not so readily defined. First it is, did Mrs. Wright kill her husband? Then it becomes, will the women reveal or conceal their discoveries? Similar changes at the crisis are common; but upon the second form of the question hangs the more vital question, will Mrs. Wright, a character who has never been seen by the audience, go free or be condemned for murder? The audience has been sympathetically identified with her, and it is the resolution of her fate which they await and receive with relief when Mrs. Hale conceals the box with the bird. Like the question, the conflict is not easy to define. It is not simply between Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters and the men, although they defeat the purpose of the men, who are, however, ironically unaware of any conflict in that direction. Yet it is Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters who exercise their will in final decision. Almost up to the decision the conflict is in a

way between Mrs. Wright and the other two women, Mrs. Wright speaking for herself through the inanimate things in her kitchen that reveal her life. Then the identification between Mrs. Wright and the other women triumphs and the conflict is between the point of view of women's lives and that of men and their law. Mrs. Wright is the protagonist, the most strongly felt force in the play, but engaging in the conflict by proxy.

Eugene O'Neill wrote of his *The Moon of the Caribbees* that the spirit of the sea is the hero. The play is essentially a creation of mood, the brooding, eternal, and impassive beauty which is one of the aspects of the sea. There is the minimum of active plot. The British tramp steamer *Glencairn* is at anchor on a calm sea under a full moon off an island of the West Indies. The sound of native singing comes across the water. A boat-load of Negro women smuggle rum aboard. The seamen get drunk and carouse with the women. There is a fight, a man is knifed. The Mate appears on the scene, finds the wound is minor, discovers the women have been selling rum and puts them off the boat without their money. The deck returns to its quiet in the moonlight broken only by "the haunted, saddened voice of that brooding music." Woven through this plot is another slender thread of plot, of Smitty who has gone to sea because of a girl and memories. His memories are disturbed by the music, he almost joins with his mates in their carouse, but turns in disgust from the Negro woman who has approached him, and gets drunk in solitude to forget his memories. There is an old Donkeyman, too old for drink and women, who smokes his pipe and looks on tranquilly. His life has held the material for memories, but he isn't bothered by them.

The episode of the smuggled rum and the fight is deliberately anticlimactic in its resolution. Deeds of human violence with passion on a ship at sea seem a defiance of the surrounding impersonal immensity, as Conrad has presented superbly. This "bit av a harmless foight," as Driscoll calls it to the Mate, does not disturb the mood. The seamen in their natural roughness and direct vulgarity pursue their

own lives of simple desires easily satisfied with the sea as their background, not a part of it, not out of tune with it. The more finespun but futile individuality of Smitty with his feeble protest and gesture of drink is out of harmony and sinks into insignificance against the brooding silence of the sea. The old Donkeyman has lived with the sea until he is at one with its mood.

The Moon of the Caribbees follows the norm in the pattern of the two slight interwoven plots, without which the purpose of the play could not have been given form to compel attention in the theatre. The organic unity of the play, however, is not that of a well-drawn conflict and exercise of will, but creation of a mood. The human activity of the effort of the seamen to enjoy their rum and women without getting caught, from which Smitty holds aloof, joins with the vast impersonality of the sea to isolate him with his memories. Smitty is too weak in face of the strong impassivity of the sea to create any deep sense of conflict; the effect is contrast, rather, with Smitty and his affairs a shadow on the canvas. The composition approximates that of painting or music. The old Donkeyman tranquilly smoking his pipe in the moonlight, and giving kindly but detached advice to Smitty, remains more important and significant as an object of interest to the audience than Smitty because he blends with the mood of the sea.

O'Neill did not achieve exactly the suggestion of the epic largeness of the spirit of the sea which he aimed at, as quoted by Barrett Clark in his book, *Eugene O'Neill*. The haunting music is from the shore, not of the sea, another of the contrasting shades which blend into the unity of the whole. It is the singing which disturbs Smitty's memories, and in the mood of the play creates a nostalgic sadness, sweet melancholy, a gentle consciousness of human contacts from which one may be peacefully detached. For the old Donkeyman it "Sounds kinder pretty—low an' mournful—same as listenin' to the organ outside o' church of a Sunday." The music is pure theatricality, of course, and good theatricality. It is a curious fact that O'Neill, who despises theatricality, has more "good theatre," both well and badly used, in his

plays than perhaps any other contemporary dramatist. He has achieved some of his most powerful effects with it, and he has marred plays with it. In *The Moon of the Caribbees* he achieved a perfect effect not quite what he intended.

Of the seven plays in the volume entitled *The Moon of the Caribbees and Six Other Plays of the Sea*, the most powerful is *Ile*, which in theme and structure is traditional, the conflict in a man between the passion for an idea and the strongest of personal ties. Captain Keeney risks his wife's sanity at the crisis for his pride that he has never returned to Homeport from a whaling trip without a full ship of "ile." He gets the "ile" but his wife's mind is sacrificed. In the hard impact of its ruthless tragic action there is more of the epic character of the sea in *Ile* than in *The Moon of the Caribbees*. Nevertheless, in its subtlety of conception and construction *The Moon of the Caribbees* is the most interesting play of the volume when placed in the theatre. It is an example of about how far a one-act play can depart successfully from the norm.

Analysis of these representative examples of successful departure from the norm reveals two important principles for planning the construction of one's own play. It is evident in each play that the variations arise from the situation and material and a clearly conceived purpose in the author's mind; they are solutions to problems. At the same time, a clear understanding and recognition of the norm is evident; with the variations go compensating devices for audience attention and the dramatic cycle of emotion.

All of the one-act plays discussed thus far have been realistic. In the scope of the short play, fantasy calls for special recognition. It is difficult to sustain the mood and illusion of fantasy over long duration, but there is a distinguished literature of short fantasies. All but two of the plays of Lord Dunsany's two volumes entitled *Plays of Gods and Men* and *Five Plays* belong to this genre and hold a high place there. *A Night at an Inn* is not strictly a fantasy; it is a play of the externally real world into which a supernatural occurrence enters.

The successful writing of fantasy is a matter of four prin-

ciples. First, the dramatist must create out of his imagination a world consistent within itself, possessed of logical truth to the premises of his imagination. Fantasy carries no implication of uncontrolled freedom. The illusion of reality for the audience will depend first of all upon the unity of the world created by the dramatist. There must be a background complete and whole in the dramatist's mind, with a clear conception of what can happen in that world, and an inner conviction of its reality. Lord Dunsany's plays are set in such places as "Outside the gate of Thalanna," "The jungle city of Thek in the reign of King Karnas," or in *The Gods of the Mountains*, simply "The East," the mythical East of those musically named cities and kings of his imagination. The gods can descend from the mountains because the mountains are in that mythical East; they can turn the beggars to stone because the beggars are named Agmar, Slag, Ulf, Oogno, Thahn, and Mlan. The idol in *A Night at an Inn* comes from that mythical East, and the play is a fantasy to a degree because it depends on the thought, what would happen if people from the world of external reality intruded crassly there? The Manufacturer who makes dreams and delivers them can enter the cottage in Oliphant Down's *The Maker of Dreams* because it is the cottage of Pierrette and Pierrot. In *Behind a Watteau Picture*, Robert Emmons Rogers opens the gate in the wall at the back of a Watteau picture; the figures enter and live a Watteau life there. Fantasy does not necessarily involve supernatural or impossible happenings. Some king *might* leave his kingdom to a camel-driver and go with a gypsy girl to dwell the rest of his life in the tents of the Arabs, but it is because his city is Thalanna on the edge of a desert of the imagination that the King in Lord Dunsany's *The Tents of the Arabs* leaves Bel-Narb to reign and goes away with Eznarza. Every fantasy begins with a fiction and all that follows must be true to the fiction.

Secondly, the illusion of reality depends upon observed truth in detail with the imagined truth of the whole. The writer of fantasy needs to be as accurate in his observation of external reality as the realist. Probably the mind possesses

no images not founded on experience. It can create new combinations of details. Nearly everyone has at some time amused himself by tracing each detail in the weird composition of a dream to its origin in remembered experience. Pierrette is a real person in *The Maker of Dreams* because of the homely little details of her domesticity. The imagined "East" of Lord Dunsany's plays is real because it is a mosaic of details from the known East. Consider the composition of a speech of Bel-Narb, the camel-driver, from *The Tents of the Arabs*:

"If God were to make *me* King I would go down to the edge of the desert once, and I would shake the sand out of my turban and out of my beard, and then I would never look at the desert again. Greedy and parched old parent of thousands of devils! He might cover the wells with sand, and blow with his Siroc year after year and century after century, and never earn one of my curses—if God made *me* King."

But upon Lord Dunsany's desert of literal truth of detail falls the light that never was by sea or land:

KING: We will dwell a little apart in a dear brown tent.

EZNARZA: We shall hear the sand again, whispering low to the dawn-wind.

KING: We shall hear the nomads stirring in their camps far off because it is dawn.

EZNARZA: The jackals will patter past us slipping back to the hills.

KING: When at evening the sun is set we shall weep for no day that is gone.

EZNARZA: I will raise up my head of a night-time against the sky, and the old, old unbought stars shall twinkle through my hair, and we shall not envy any of the diademed queens of the world.

The single truth of the imagination welds the many truths of observation into fantasy.

The passages from *The Tents of the Arabs* illustrate the third necessity of fantasy. Fantasy requires a special unity of style, and, whether prose or poetry, it should possess beauty and distinction. At the same time, the dialogue must

maintain characterization of the speakers. The beauty of Lord Dunsany's style is derived from the rhythm and diction of the Bible touched with a glow of Celtic romance. The Biblical style gives an air of familiarity to his mythical East, and its simplicity and directness assist the illusion of reality.

The fourth principle, really the first, of fantasy is truth to human experience. Fantasy as such is not removed from life. It may move in airy realms of fancy, or it may penetrate to the most profound truths of existence with all the emotional impact of realism. In fact, what fantasy does sometimes is to strike away unessentials, distracting and limiting external details, and lay bare the heart of the subject. Because Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo* achieves this to a supreme degree, it stands with *Riders to the Sea* as one of the few truly great one-act plays.

A Harlequinade, which is exquisite satire, the distilled essence of superficiality, is interrupted by Cothurnus, the masque of tragedy. Cothurnus calls Thyrsis and Corydon, shepherds in goatskin garments, to the stage to play their scene, although they protest they are not ready and the stage is set for a farce; they cannot act a tragedy with comic properties. Cothurnus insists, and holds the prompt-book. The scene opens on idyllic comradeship. Corydon proposes a song about a lamb. Thyrsis forgets his line, but is prompted by Cothurnus, "I know a game worth two of that." They will build a wall of rocks and say that one side belongs to one and the other to the other, and one may not come upon the other's side unless the other says he may, or it will be the worse for him. They weave a wall of colored crepe ribbons from the Harlequinade setting. They grow apart and strange to one another. All the water is on Thyrsis' side and Corydon's sheep are dying of thirst. Corydon finds colored stones and gold (a bowl of confetti and paper ribbons) on his side, with which he taunts Thyrsis. The shepherds try to slip back from the silly game to their natural selves; Cothurnus inexorably prompts them. Strangeness grows to hatred. The tragedy pursues its inevitable course to the death of the shepherds: Thyrsis poisons

Corydon with a black weed (confetti) in a bowl of water, Corydon strangles Thyrsis with a strand of jewels (colored paper ribbons)—across the wall. It was only a game but they find they are killing one another in earnest. Corydon cries, "Let's not play this game a minute more . . . let's make up a little song about a lamb. . . . I'm coming over the wall, no matter what you say—I want to be near you." He gropes his way toward Thyrsis, striding through the frail paper of the wall without knowing it, and dies across the body of his friend. Cothurnus closes the prompt-book, arises matter-of-factly, places the table over the bodies with the cover drawn down so as to hide them from actors on the stage but leave them visible to the audience, and commands, "Strike the scene." Pierrot and Columbine return, put the set in order, and go on with the farce as at the beginning.

The tragedy of Thyrsis and Corydon appears to be thrice removed from reality. The characters are actors of a play within a play upon a stage which is the semblance of a stage; they are characters of a long-ago world of imagination, goat-skin-clad shepherds out of the Idylls of Theocritus; and their tragedy is enacted with the properties of a farce. All that is left is the essence of tragedy. In the theatre, out of Miss Millay's strange merging of a game into earnest, the death of the two shepherds reaches across the footlights and grips the audience with absolute reality of emotion.

Fantasy cannot be forced, it must come from a quality of the author's mind. If he finds that a deep inner illusion of an emotional reality is beginning to create in his imagination its own world of outward form, he is ready to undertake fantasy, and will find much joy in it.

The one-act play is expanding in form and in content in the last few years and is entering upon a new era of production opportunities. In the nineteenth century the one-act play made regular appearance in the commercial theatre as a curtain-raiser, usually a farce preceding the heavier play. The old slapstick two-reeler as an added attraction to the feature was not a popularizing invention of the moving-picture industry, but an inheritance from the legitimate theatre. One-act plays were also a regular feature of vaude-

ville billings to the time when vaudeville gave way to the revue and musical show. The early commercial development of the one-act play in this country conventionalized it. It was fitted closely to about twenty minutes to a half-hour playing time, and fast pace and sharp endings were required. The one-act play came to be thought of as a neat trick for reversal. In the commercial theatres of other countries, especially of Spain and Ireland, drama has had more freedom of length. Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker's Wedding* are in two acts, and the Spanish play most familiar to audiences in this country, Sierra's *The Cradle Song*, is a two-act play. Plays might run fifteen minutes, an hour, or an hour and a half, plays of varying lengths being combined for an evening's bill. In this country it came to be either the two-hour play or the short snappy one-act or nothing.

The Little Theatre movement opened a new and broad field for the one-act form. Taking their start from the influence of drama abroad, the new amateur theatres produced plays by Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, Barrie, Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, Sudermann, Tchekoff, Strindberg, Serafin and Joaquin Quintero, and many others. Under the stimulus of Little Theatre opportunities and the foreign drama a literature of American one-act plays of artistic substance and close to life was created. For some reason, however, the Little Theatre fell unimaginatively into the habit of producing regularly bills of three one-act plays—a long play was three acts, so the equivalent for an evening's entertainment was three one-acts. The American plays improved in content and subtlety of conception, but tended to stick to one scene and to hover closely about the twenty to thirty minute length. O'Neill, as was to be expected, shattered the convention with *The Emperor Jones*, in 1920.

The Emperor Jones runs close to an hour's playing time and is in eight scenes. Brutus Jones, an escaped convict, has made himself "emperor" of an island in the West Indies. There is an uprising of his native subjects and he endeavors to make his getaway through the jungle at night to a boat, as he had planned in advance for such a contingency. He

carries a revolver, the last bullet silver for himself if caught, believing lead could not kill him. The natives beat tom-toms timed with the heartbeat all through the night—the audience is subjected to the sound throughout the play. The inescapable and insistent sound drives Jones into panic; his civilization is stripped from him, and he sinks step by step into the fears planted deep in his consciousness—first the “Little Formless Fears,” then memory of the prison, then slavery, and back to the Congo Witch-Doctor and the Crocodile God. Each fear rises before him as a vision which drives him frantically to fire one of his precious bullets, at last the silver bullet. He has moved in a circle through the jungle as the natives expected from their tom-tom magic, and they are waiting for him with silver bullets as he comes out where he entered. By the expressionistic device of projecting the envisioned terrors from the mind of the Emperor Jones onto the stage, and the use of dim spotlights and blackouts, O'Neill encompassed within the compact and continuous action appropriate to the one-act form not only the mobility of the episode, but the scope of the half-civilized Negro's ancestral history as his determining fate. O'Neill applied to the one-act form the flexibilities of modern stage-setting and lighting.

The Emperor Jones was admired but not immediately influential. It was, however, a forerunner of one-act plays of the magnitude of Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, first produced by the Group Theatre in 1935, and Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* in 1936, both immediately and powerfully influential. Each play has a playing time of around an hour and encompasses a wide range of scene.

Waiting for Lefty opens on a meeting of taxi-drivers. A committee of workers is seated on the stage and a union leader is trying to prevent the taxi-drivers from striking. He addresses the audience as the meeting, actors being planted in the audience for responses. While they are waiting for their committee chairman, Lefty, a committee member, Joe, starts to address the audience; the lights fade out and a white spot picks out a playing space between the men on the stage for a scene in Joe's home. Six episodes follow in swift suc-

cession; each episode crystallizes a moment of protest, of social anger, the crucial moment in the life of each committeeman which brought him to that platform. The lights come up on the platform. A man dashes up the center aisle from the back of the house; he runs up on the stage and says, "Boys, they just found Lefty!" There are cries of "What?" "Where?" answered with "Behind the car barns with a bullet in his head!" The play ends in an address directed at the audience, and a demand for an answer. Cries of "Strike! Strike!" come from the audience and grow into a shout.

In his notes for production Odets states that the form used is "the old black-face minstrel form of chorus, end men, specialty men and interlocutor." The form and devices of the play are essentially those of *The Emperor Jones* with the addition of intimacy with the audience from the minstrel show.

In *Bury the Dead* the time is "the second year of the war that is to begin tomorrow night." The scene is a torn-over battlefield some miles behind the present lines, where a burial detail are digging a common grave for six bodies piled near-by, wrapped in canvas. The grave is sunk in the stage (accomplished by building out over the orchestra pit if there is no convenient trap), so that the audience can see the soldiers standing in the grave only from the hip up. The bodies are lowered into the grave. In the midst of the burial services the dead soldiers stand up, backs to the audience, and remain so throughout the play. They refuse to lie down and be dead, and at the end swarm out of the grave and over the scene with a movement which in the dim light seems to spread out into thousands, millions of dead men leaving their graves. Their refusal to die upsets the army, the church, the men's families, the press—creates a world-wide furor, all brought within the compass of the stage in a continuous action with blackouts and flashing spotlights over different levels. Mr. Shaw's stage directions indicate only two planes besides that of the grave-pit, the bare front stage and a platform across the rear of the stage. The effect has been enhanced in production with more variety of levels.

In *Bury the Dead* the influence of Russian constructivist staging appears, a staging independent of time and space, and therefore of scenery; the stage is purely a place for an action, and stage construction a matter of providing acting spaces.

The Federal Theatre with its great variety of production situations, the Labor Stage also with variety of production situations, and the rise of more or less unconventional professional producing organizations such as the Group Theatre, the Theatre Union, and Actors Repertory Theatre, all are opening up opportunities for the short play. Noel Coward's experiment three seasons ago with three programs of three short plays each, collectively entitled *Tonight at 8:30*, returned the short play to the regular commercial theatre channels. Mr. Coward wrote all of the nine plays especially for the new production series, and they immediately became a season's hit. Undoubtedly the presence of Mr. Coward and Miss Lawrence in the casts had a great deal to do with the really startling success of the *Tonight at 8:30* programs, but evidently the audiences liked the short plays and varied evening in the theatre. Several of Mr. Coward's plays are among those which contribute to the loosening of range of technique and expansion of content for the one-act play. In the past two years, following the success of Odets' and Shaw's plays and the *Tonight at 8:30* venture, several one-act projects for Broadway have been announced and The One Act Repertory Company opening in one of Sam H. Grisman's theatres has become a fact.

As the amateur theatres developed the experience for sustained roles in their companies they tended to turn almost exclusively from one-act to long plays. That was interesting for the actors, but unfortunate for the audiences. The one-acter is no little brother tagging along unable to play the games of the big play. It is an independent art-form with its distinctive qualities and field for accomplishment. It calls for a special unity, economy, and precision, the fine art of suggestion. When well written it is a form of beautiful clarity. As Mr. Coward suggests in the introduction to *Tonight at 8:30*, acceptance of the short play in the theatre

would save us from many a padded long play. It is reasonably certain now that the short play in its expanded scope of content and technique is going to return to popularity in the amateur theatre by way of the professional and semi-professional theatres.

In the meantime radio is opening up an indefinitely expanding field for short plays of a new and special technique. From the beginning of the British Broadcasting Corporation the dramatic programs have been favored in England, with an average of two major drama broadcasts a week. Under our system of commercial sponsorship radio drama has been of slower growth in this country, with a predominance of the decidedly trivial skit and serial types. Drama of whatever type, however, according to a recent survey, has stepped up into a position of popularity second only to that of musical programs. Officials of both the major broadcasting companies have believed for some time that the public was ready for a higher type of dramatic fare on the air and are doing everything possible, particularly through the Columbia Workshop and the NBC Guild, with its "Great Plays" series, to foster the development of radio drama. Radio, being a medium purely of sound, offers special opportunity for the dramatic power of language, for poetry, and for drama which is literature as well as theatre. The broadcasting companies are seeking plays that are both good drama and of literary distinction. *The Fall of the City*, by Archibald MacLeish, one of our foremost poets, and four poetic dramas for the air in rapid succession from Maxwell Anderson, a leading dramatist, have given the development of radio drama a fine boost in the last year and a half, and the importance of this new field is no longer a matter of speculation.

VII. CHARACTERIZATION

THE mechanics of construction are the craftsmanship of playwriting, and every art must be built upon a foundation of solid craftsmanship. Characterization is the content of the play, and represents knowledge of life. That is something which cannot be taught or learned. It can, however, be cultivated and there are a few principles which give assistance in its application to drama.

The most perfect mechanics of construction will not hold an audience's attention without the human content of activity of someone's will and concern for his fate. A play is first of all an action, but it is living human beings who act and are acted upon. A warm reality of life upon the stage goes hand in hand with good construction as a primary requisite to success in the theatre. Such an achievement depends upon two things, intimate knowledge of the kind of people presented, and the capacity for projection of the imagination into the experience of others. When a student has had trouble finding the right material for a play and consults with me about it, I ask, "What do you *know*?" The student often finds the right track by getting into a familiar background. Characterization in drama is more than a reportorial job, however; it must go below the surface. The projection on the stage through what a character says and does of a conviction of the reality of his thought and feeling is a fusion of three things, the author's own experience, observation, and dramatic imagination. Dramatic imagination is the capacity to feel what one has experienced in essence at a higher level of intensity. To take an extreme example, it is not likely that Shakespeare had ever committed a murder when he so convincingly portrayed the emotions and conduct of a murderer in Macbeth. But every man has hesitated on the brink of some action

repugnant to his nature or his conscience, and every man has experienced remorse in some degree. It is probable that in contemplating the subject of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's own recollections of remorse were intensified in his imagination until for a time he lived in the horror of Macbeth's crimes. At the same time, by observation, the imaginative experience of remorse assumed the mode appropriate to the character which he had conceived for Macbeth. Macbeth had been a good man by generous instinct rather than by fixed moral principles, and his remorse expressed itself more in physical repulsion from horror and ultimately an utter weariness of mind than in consciousness of guilt. That is the peculiar capacity of the dramatist, to be able to identify himself with the imagined experience of people unlike himself until he writes his characters as from within.

Every character in the play, even the most minor, must have reality. It is almost essential that the protagonist be a sympathetic character. The term "sympathetic" is used technically in drama of a character with whom the audience identifies itself, and the audience must be given opportunity for identification. As was said in an earlier chapter, the conflict of drama is not like that of a prize-fight or a football game, in which there are merely two sides struggling against each other. For drama the audience must be conscious of one side as the struggling one, the other as the opposition. The spectators at a sporting event, even when they have no money up and are in no way allied to either side, do identify themselves strongly with one side or the other, which shows how inherent is the desire for drama. When drama is not present in a spectacle the audience is inclined to make drama of it. People who knew little of either Schmeling or Louis in the last world heavyweight championship prize-fight imagined themselves into ardent partisanship.

The characters of a play other than the protagonist may be sympathetic or not. The unsympathetic characters must be presented with a convincingness of reality by which the audience knows what they feel as would an onlooker; but

for the sympathetic character, the audience will themselves experience what the character feels.

This response of the audience does not depend upon the selection of the character, but upon the point of view, the light in which the dramatist presents the character. The whole matter of dramatic identification is complex and appears in endless variations. There is no strangeness in identification with the charm and nobility of Rosalind and Orlando, or with the devotion of Cordelia or the torments of disillusion in the idealistic Hamlet. But we also experience identification with the villain-protagonists Macbeth and Richard III. Shakespeare makes us feel admiration for and an expansion of consciousness into their great capacities, destroyed in Macbeth, misdirected in Richard. The reaction is in part identification and in part detached contemplation. We desire their overthrow, but feel their pride, ambition, and agonies of defeat because Shakespeare presented them not in hatred, but in admiration and pity for wasted powers and energies. Few people would have seen possibility for identification in the degenerate characters in *Tobacco Road*, but as they are presented by Erskine Caldwell and Jack Kirkland, one of the most remarkably complete identifications in the modern theatre is experienced. The authors have looked upon the characters without harshness and without contempt and have drawn the audience into the bond of common humanity, stunted and warped as it is on the old tobacco road of Georgia. In final judgment, we may despise Hedda Gabler. Perhaps Ibsen intended us to. But our judgment will be in pity because Ibsen has given us understanding of Hedda's experience. He has made clear the social and personal conditions which made Hedda what she was, and has identified us for a time with her unused brilliance, her pride, her boredom and sense of futility, her rebellion against her fate. Through the complex and varied identifications of drama, the emotional capacities of the audience and the range of their understanding of human life are expanded.

If the characters are to be convincing they must be consistent. The first few revealing touches for a character in

the play are like points on a graph; they establish a curve, and everything the character says or does must fall on that curve. There are two temptations to inconsistency, the pressures of theme and of plot. The characteristic starting-point for a play with Ibsen was a theme to be presented, but as a master-dramatist one of his first principles was subordination of theme to character. As the characters came to life in the course of writing he would alter the theme as he had planned it if necessary to maintain consistency of characterization. If the characters of a play are obviously puppets forced by the dramatist to go through unnatural motions to illustrate his theme, the theme of course loses entirely the peculiar force which drama can give. The business of a play with a theme is to give concrete reality and emotional pressure to a principle by showing it in living operation.

Inconsistency of characterization for the sake of plot is simply a slipshod or an unfair way of bringing about complications, suspense, reversals, and surprises. The action must come from the characters and can, of course, be given an unexpected turn by causing a character to act in a way unpredictable from preceding characterization or without connection with subsequent conduct, that is, off the curve. Everyone knows the feeling of resentment aroused by the discovery of false leads in a detective story, or in a mystery-thriller on the stage. *The Bat* remains as a classic of its type because the curtain goes down on the first act with every character who has appeared (I have forgotten whether it is seven or eleven) suspected of being the "Bat," without a single false lead. As the play progresses the audience cannot look back upon any action that aroused suspicion and say that it was out of character. *The Bat* ran for three years and over one thousand performances, the longest continuous run in its time after *Abie's Irish Rose*, and was revived last year. The play was followed by imitators, the closest in type being *The Cat and the Canary*. The difference was glaring. Suspicion was distributed around with the same liberality, but only by free use of false leads. One of the most tense moments came when the heroine suffering from a headache sat alone awaiting the family doctor. When he

entered, he moved round behind her chair and raised his arms with his hands poised in a clutching, clawlike effect over the head of the young woman. The effect was exaggerated in his shadow thrown on the wall. Murder had been committed by strangling, and the audience held its breath, believing that here was the "Cat," and the next moment the hands would be around the heroine's fair throat. Then the doctor's hands descended gently on the patient's brow, and he was just the kind family doctor after all. The expectation and suspense were created by conduct entirely inappropriate to the character, an out-and-out false lead. The whole play went on in the same manner. The play packed enough thrills to draw an audience for a year, but the difference between one and three years was a measure of the comparative merits of *The Cat and the Canary* and *The Bat*. Since characterization is at a minimum in melodrama, the effect of inconsistencies is felt even more severely in higher types of drama.

There is no use denying that occasionally a clever writer turns out an entertaining play and a commercial success by cheating a bit on the characterization. But the audience usually feels some discomfort even when it does not diagnose the cause, and its response to the play lacks something of wholeheartedness. *The Late Christopher Bean* is an example. The play was a hit. Almost everyone I have heard speak of the play enjoyed it exceedingly and yet showed some reservation, some vague feeling, if no more, that it was not quite first-rate, a little "phoney." The trouble is with the character curve of Dr. Haggett. Dr. Haggett is a New England country doctor in modest circumstances, hounded by his wife and older daughter for luxuries beyond their means. He appears as a simple, good man who cares more for his practice than for money. The family had once taken in and nursed until he died a poor and ill young painter, Chris Bean, who left a number of his paintings with Abby, the hired help and the only one of the household who had appreciated them. Years after his death, Christopher Bean was discovered to be a genius, and New York art dealers descended upon Dr. Haggett. With fortune dangling before

him, Dr. Haggett becomes seized with the greed he has all his life decried. The rest of the play is the story of the efforts of the dealers to trick Dr. Haggett and of Dr. Haggett to trick Abby out of the paintings. The whole complication of the play depends upon Dr. Haggett's transformation of character, upon his actual greed and upon his greed being unsuspected. The character of Abby may well be immortal, and the entire play is cleverly written. But for the sake of the surprise and the irony to the audience, Dr. Haggett is presented too convincingly in the opening of the play as the simple, honest man for the transformation to be quite believable. One can forgive something in the play, however, for the sake of the opportunity to have known Abby.

Shaw in *The Doctor's Dilemma* similarly tricks the audience. At the end of the second act one wonders how a third act can be developed without being anticlimactic; all the possible complications seem to have been exhausted. Shaw comes back with a third act more complicated and hilarious than either that precedes, but he does it by practically introducing new characters under the names of the people of the first two acts. Shaw was probably entirely conscious of what he was doing. He has never shown a high respect for the intelligence of audiences in comparison to his own, and relies on his brilliance and wit and reputation to carry off pretty cavalier conduct as a dramatist. Nevertheless, it is Shaw's sound work which has given him his reputation. Consistency of characterization is a part of the foundation upon which every dramatist must build.

One of the essentials to solid reality and consistency in characterization is for the writer to know all about the character, his life between scenes as well as on the stage, his life before the play opens, his childhood, perhaps his parents and grandparents. Ibsen once remarked to a friend on Nora in *A Doll's House*: "The things I know about that young woman that aren't in the play would surprise you." The character curve is established before the play opens; the play takes in only an arc of it. What a character is grows out of what he has been and done. A complete imagined

life must exist in the mind of the dramatist before he can put any portion of it on the stage with truth.

A minor problem frequently arises in connection with characters in plays which are very directly derived from characters in life. It seems to me sometimes that I almost never point to an action or a speech in one of my students' plays as unconvincing without the student replying promptly, "Oh, but that must be all right because it is what the person really did." It is one of the old problems of fiction and drama, and the traditional answers are that truth is often stranger than fiction, and that the possible in life cannot always be made believable in fiction, since fictional belief is an illusion of reality and easily broken. These clichés are probably not true and, in either case, do not touch the problem, which is simply a matter of the character curve. Life is not transferred to fiction but transformed. When the dramatist bases a character on someone in life, he makes some changes. For the framing of the drama, the character does things and says things in the play his original never did or said. Those changes are part of the plotting of the character curve; a new curve is bound to be established, perhaps close to the line of the original but never identical. When something the character in life did is unconvincing in the play it is because it is inconsistent with something that has been introduced by the imagination of the dramatist. More often than not the first draft of a play based closely on characters and an action from life is too close to the source. In subsequent drafts, as the dramatist gains perspective and the world he has imagined becomes more real to him, he becomes more free and his play progresses toward consistency, form, and significance.

The basis of characterization lies in the plot itself. What people are is revealed in how they act under pressure. Aristotle put it that "character is that which reveals moral purpose: it shows what kind of things, in cases of doubt, a man chooses or avoids." Moral purpose unless very broadly understood is perhaps too limiting a phrase for character as discussed here, which is the whole quality of a man, revealed not only in what he chooses, but in how he chooses and

how he carries out his choice. Drama by its nature as conflict puts the characters under a special pressure of choice. There is always an element of the unusual, of special circumstance, in drama. The most commonplace levels of life and ordinary characters may contain the material of drama to the right perception, but something out of the ordinary has to be injected into the situation to create an attack, the precipitation of conflict. The occasion of the attack may be what is most characteristic of a background and an individual's life brought to a cumulative pressure, as in *Riders to the Sea*: because Maurya has lost many sons to the sea, and Bartley is the last son, there is the beginning of drama when he undertakes a journey by sea with storm threatening. Or the tension may be created by the intrusion of some entirely strange and unexpected element, as in *The Late Christopher Bean*. Into the quiet and settled life of Dr. Haggett comes the possibility of sudden wealth. He is bowled over by it, and what was hidden in his character is revealed. The idea for the play is sound, and would be convincing if there were some foreshadowing of the possibility of greed in Dr. Haggett, or if he had not been put to such lengths of dishonesty and heartlessness with Abby. Complete truth was sacrificed to theatricality. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is an example of a third possibility. A course of events established by a past action, through a new combination of circumstances, develops an unexpected consequence. Nora had committed a forgery to obtain money to save her husband's life. She believed the forgery to be completely hidden. One man knew of it and bided his time until a combination of circumstances made it a weapon in his hands, and he used his knowledge as pressure on Nora for blackmail through her husband. Under the tension of the crisis of the play, the surface of the husband's character is broken through and his basic self-interestedness and weakness are exposed, while for Nora, inherent but undeveloped strength is revealed.

The element of the unusual does not imply violence. Beginning dramatists, as well as Eugene O'Neill, frequently have a tendency to run to excess with murders, suicides, and

insanity. The abnormal is usually less interesting than the normal, but almost every play depends upon something exceptional to crystallize the normal.

The course of a play in its relation to character, with its successive complications and minor crises leading to the major crisis, is like the twisting of a rope. As the tension increases, one strand, then another and another, snaps, until finally the rope breaks. Under dramatic crises surface restraints and protections give way and what has been hidden is revealed, or what has been evident as characteristic is brought to a focus. That is the reason that in so many plays plot interest shifts to character interest at the major crisis.

The problem of the dramatist is to create both characters and plot in such a way that each person and each event has the reality of truth to a background and at the time individual reality. The characters are created and live in the play and never lived anywhere else. But they could move out of the play into the world and be at home there. The precise events of the play happened to the characters; but they are the kind of events which could happen naturally to similar people in a corresponding background. In other words, the dramatist creates a new inhabitant for some spot of the earth, but he has an air of familiarity as though he had lived there a long time.

VIII. DIALOGUE

THE dramatist has at his disposal just two means of presenting character: plot and dialogue, what men do and what they say. If dialogue is to create character it must be in the idiom of the speaker. The dramatist must have an ear and retentive memory for the flavor of speech, again something which cannot be taught or learned, but which can be cultivated. I have known many people who express a desire to write plays, but say they are sure they could never write dialogue. They have friends who tell stories and repeat conversation almost word for word, but they can remember only the import of what people say, never the exact words. Often those same people when they try writing a play find they can write perfectly convincing dialogue. The reason is that by the time they have gone through the initial stages of thought and scenario writing, the characters come to life in their minds. The writer is not remembering what someone has said, but is mentally hearing someone speak at the moment. One of my students with an exceptional talent for dialogue had written a folk-play of poor people in a cabin in the South, a background she knew very well. There was an old woman in the play. At one point I suggested the old woman needed an extra line. The author sat and looked at the floor for a little, then looked up, shook her head, and said, "I can't hear her say anything." I pursued the point, and asked what the old woman would be doing then—there seemed a blank spot. The author agreed after a moment about the blank spot and looked at the floor again. Then she looked up confidently and answered, "She's chewing on a carrot." A stage direction was written in instead of an extra speech.

Many dramatists, especially for comedy, have kept notebooks of good lines for subsequent introduction into their

plays. Such a practice is often a great help for toning up a play, but the basis of dialogue lies within the characters, and comes by dramatic identification. A subconscious memory for the manner of speech of people of the same class or type is then released. The dramatist, however, is creating an individual who never lived before and must to a degree create the character's own personal way of speaking.

Much the most common trouble in the first attempt to create dialogue is a lack of awareness that it is wrong. Instead of the quality of speech it has the quality of writing, is too formal in diction, too involved and heavy in sentence structure for speech; and all the characters talk alike. Or the dialogue is stilted, or it is full of echoes from other plays. A graduate student who had had long experience as a director and actor but had never tried writing a play set his first play on a Wyoming ranch. The dialogue as a whole was convincing, but scattered through, especially in the more highly emotional speeches, appeared what struck my ear distinctly as the rhythm and turn of phrase of Irish folk speech. The author was completely surprised when I mentioned it to him because he had lived for years on a western ranch and was thoroughly familiar with the speech. When I pointed out the passages he recognized their incongruity and their source. He had directed and acted in Synge's plays and had a particularly deep feeling for them. The author was then able to go through his play and weed out the false dialogue. That is a common experience. When I tell a student his dialogue is wrong, he is likely not to see the difficulty, but when a few examples of the error are pointed out and analyzed, a light dawns and he may rewrite the play into natural speech. Anyone who has written his first play and been told by a competent critic that his dialogue is all wrong, completely unnatural, need not feel discouraged. I have known people who later showed a real flair for dialogue to start out that way. There is no aspect of dramatic writing for which the critic at hand is more helpful, but the secret of forestalling the critic is to imagine the characters completely before writing, and work for intensity of dramatic identification. Be wary of what comes too easily. The

old saying that first thoughts are best thoughts is not true. The phrases and rhythms from other plays are likely to be lying nearest the surface of the mind and to come first. One has to be willing to dig down into his mental resources.

At the same time that dialogue must be convincing as actual speech, good dialogue is not an imitation of actual speech. By catching the essential quality of speech the dramatist creates the illusion of reality. In life people talk in so stumbling, confused, and redundant a manner that reportorial dialogue would be unbearably dull in the theatre. What is worse, it would lack clarity. Like everything else in art, the writing of good dialogue involves selecting what is significant and giving it order. The characters of drama are more articulate and more self-revealing than people in life. The crises of the plot create the tensions which reveal character, but then the dramatist gives his characters speech which reveals the significance of those moments in more clean-cut fashion than would be true for similar crises in life.

Dramatic articulateness does not necessarily mean a flow of speech, but the most immediately and clearly expressive speech, be it in one word or fifty. Such speech is tied up with character. Some of the most profoundly revealing moments in Shakespeare, who commanded the most extraordinary fluency of dramatic expression, are in the fewest words. The whole of Desdemona's chastity, her profound hurt, her bewilderment, are in the speech, "Am I that name, Iago?" when Othello has called her whore. When King Lear with mind still clouded but partially healed is restored to Cordelia and says, "I think this lady to be my child Cordelia," the fullness of her heart with love and devotion is completely expressed in the choking repetition, "And so I am, I am." And again, when Lear accuses himself of having wronged her and given her cause to hate him, all she can reply is, "No cause, no cause." Inarticulateness in one sense is here the most complete dramatic articulateness. On the other hand, nothing short of Lear's torrent of words in the opening of the storm scene could have expressed the significance of that hour.

As soon as the dual principle of art, selection and arrange-

ment, is admitted for the writing of dialogue, the question of the style of the dramatist enters. The difference between reportorial speech and the more expressive speech of drama is for the sake of fuller revelation, but what is to be revealed is determined by the mind of the dramatist, by his point of view on the material. A coloring from the mind and personality of the author—and that is about as far as style can be defined—will inevitably appear throughout the play if the dramatist has any vigor and distinction of personal quality. Although a drama is completed as a work of art in the theatre with the attributes of the theatre, for that is the form in which it came into being in the imagination of the dramatist, drama is basically a literary art, expression through the power of language. The dramatist creates the characters, and their speech represents his command of language. We recognize the brilliance and wit of Shaw's style, the electric vigor of Odets' style, the urbanity and wit of Behrman, the poetic richness of speech in Synge's plays. In part the dramatist finds an outlet naturally for his own personality in the selection of characters congenial to his taste and interest. Odets presents a class of people who are rather roughshod in their speech, Behrman presents polished, highly civilized people. But there is a difference in the speech of people even of the same class in plays by different authors. Behrman's characters do not talk like those of Noel Coward or Philip Barry, and Synge's Irish folk characters do not talk quite like those of Lady Gregory or Yeats. Good dialogue must strike a nice balance between the illusion of the individual reality of the characters and expression of the personal quality of the author which makes the difference between photographic realism and art.

In poetic drama the style of the author, of course, dominates more than in realistic dialogue. The reason for poetry in drama is to give fuller expression to the significance of profound moments in human experience than the convention of realism allows. The convention of poetry is especially needed for tragedy. In life people characteristically become most inarticulate in times of greatest stress and deepest emotion. That is one of the reasons we need literature.

The writer of genius, with his peculiar capacity for expression, speaks for us, releases our inarticulateness, and gives meaning to our own experience. Some moments of deepest feeling are adequately expressed realistically; Cordelia's choked speeches to her father in a poetic drama are no different from what they might have been in a prose drama. But prose and realism could never have given us the majesty in chaos of Lear in the storm scene. Not only does poetry allow of richer and more incisive expression, but the unrealistic convention of verse opens the way to other variations. In realistic drama the time permitted to speech is strictly limited by the action, and action may be most swift at a time of crisis. Just as in opera we listen to an aria between the death-blow and the last gasp, in poetic drama the significance of a crisis may be conveyed in a longer speech than the action of the moment would allow. At the curtain of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*, the aged Esdras pronounces a long speech over the bodies of Mio and Miriamne where they have died in the street when realistically he would at once have called someone to help him carry the bodies within. Esdras has been created as a character upon whom the young people's deaths would make an impact of profound meaning, and he is given time for its full utterance. That last speech is vital to the stature and significance of the play, and we accept it without disturbance from the unrealistic situation of delivery. While the style of the dramatist asserts itself more fully in poetry than in prose, the problem is just as certainly present to make each character individually distinguishable and true to himself in all he says. It is more difficult in poetic drama.

The way of drama is revelation, not exposition. The novelist may analyze his characters at length. In drama the basis of knowledge of what the characters are and what they experience should come directly through dramatic action and speech. Dependence should not be placed upon description or analysis of one character by another; or upon self-analysis from a character. Such a speech may be dramatic, a move in conflict between characters, but it needs to be carefully watched. When analysis of a character, by himself or some-

one else, is dramatic speech it usually comes late in the play and points or brings to a focus of expression what has already been fully revealed. Primarily the characters should simply *be* what they are in the drama, with analysis left to the audience.

A common precept for dialogue is that it shall be speakable for the actors. That bars sentences that are too long and involved, heavy phrases or clauses, and difficult combinations of sound in the words. But the speakableness of dialogue goes deeper than such mechanics; what it really means is that the actor after entering into identification with the part can feel natural in saying what the dramatist has written. Back of speakable dialogue is the author's identification with his characters in their creation until he achieves the illusion of reality in their speech. An aid to the author both mechanically and fundamentally is to write orally. Some dramatists dictate their plays or compose aloud as they write. Such practices are worth trying but entirely an individual matter. Everyone writing a play should try his play out orally, act all the parts himself, walking through the business and speaking the lines with all the dramatic identification he can muster.

A play is for the ear. Monotony of rhythm in a long succession of short choppy speeches, or in too many long heavy speeches close together, should be avoided. It is seldom that any speech should be over fifty words long, but there are many notable exceptions. Climactic effect in a single short pungent speech may be prepared for by a long preceding speech, and similarly a long climactic speech is often best led up to through a space of more rapid dialogue. As in any other composition unit, a long speech offers the possibility of end emphasis and usually should be climactic. A line that the audience should get with special force should not be thrust in too abruptly, but led up to; and such a line should not be obscured by immediately following lines, but should come at the end of a speech or with a natural pause within the speech. Such devices are called "pointing the lines," and apply especially to "laugh-lines." The audience will react audibly, the author hopes, to a laugh-line. If one laugh-line

treads too closely on the heels of another, it may be lost. Laugh-lines can be pointed by a structure exactly that of dramatic tension, a climactic rhythm. The response to an important laugh-line will be stronger if it is led up to by a series of such lines, each funnier than the preceding and each following a little more quickly. An amusing line which is less amusing than one immediately preceding will almost certainly fall flat. The dramatist has to know when to stop. Some people can hear themselves read better than they can hear someone else, but for most persons it is a great help in checking on the rhythms of their play if they can get someone else to read it to them.

Dramatic dialogue must tell the story. A novel or short-story may contain a great deal of characterizing dialogue, and yet if the story were to be dramatized it is entirely possible for almost none of it to be directly usable. The novelist can tell his story by saying John did this and Mary did that. When they engage in conflict through speech, he may summarize what they said and the result. The dialogue occupies the playing time of a drama and is the story. Some of the time is engaged and some of the story told by physical activity on the stage; dramatic action, however, does not mean physical movement, but progression in the situation, the meeting of minds and wills, with decisions. In *A Night at an Inn*, the three men, in speech, decide to take the ruby and go to town to sell it, leaving the Toff, and they ask the Toff for the ruby. When they return frightened, they reveal in their natural excited exclamations, not set narrative, that the three priests have followed them. When the Toff instructs the men in the plan for trapping the priests, he does it in a series of commands. These three situations in *A Night at an Inn* illustrate three ways in which dialogue can tell a story: by disagreement and discussion which leads to a decision and pressure for a change in the situation; by revealing what has happened off-stage a detail at a time as it comes out under emotional pressure, not by direct exposition; and by speech which produces physical action, introducing and accompanying it. *A Night at an Inn* is a very simple story with an especially high proportion of physical action, but even there

the burden of the narrative falls upon dialogue. The art of telling a story in dialogue is a habit of mind which comes from study of plays.

The basic requirements for dramatic dialogue are that it shall be characterizing, have some unifying distinction of style, be effective to the ear, and tell a story. It is the capacity of dialogue to combine revelation of character and story progression in a single stroke that gives to drama its peculiar force of economy and directness.

IX. TO THE LONG PLAY

THE progression from a one-act to a three-act play is not a matter of addition or multiplication. Writing a one-act play lays a foundation of familiarity with basic dramatic structure and dialogue, but a three-act play is not simply a longer play or a play with changes of scene as to time or place. As we have seen, a play with the singleness of movement of one act may be as long as a three-act play. *Bury the Dead* plays about an hour and a quarter, and there have been three-act plays in the commercial theatre which did not run over an hour and a half including the act intermissions. *The Emperor Jones* has the continuity of one act and includes changes of time and place even apart from the vision scenes. Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountains* is shorter than *Bury the Dead* and has three acts. The difference is structural as demanded by difference in material.

Scene divisions either in a one-act play or within an act of a long play are primarily a stage device for representing change of place or lapse of time, or both. Scenes are at the same time inevitably structural units, as a wise dramatist would not subject the audience to the break in attention of a change of scene except to bring onto the stage something which must be there, an essential complication or sequence of complications; or in Elizabethan drama, less frequently in modern, a necessary piece of exposition, an introduction or transition to a following scene. Both the structural purpose of the scene and the practical problem of audience attention demand that each scene be a well-built dramatic unit, starting off with question, rising to a climax, satisfying some expectation of the audience, and creating fresh carry-over suspense leading to a good curtain situation.

A play is divided into acts when the dramatic material falls into distinct movements. A dramatic action is a single

action, but it does not occupy the whole of the lives of the characters involved from the time of the beginning of the action to its end. Only those sections of the lives of the characters in which the dramatic action comes to the fore, when fresh complication forces them to do something about it, are presented on the stage. That is the difference between dramatic and biographical or historical unity. An act interval represents a poised respite, a breathing spell. A play of more than one act is like a man running a succession of rapids in a boat. When he has just passed one rapid he can rest on his oars, but the roar of the next rapid is in his ears. Such an interval in the lives of the characters may be ten minutes or it may be ten years. Each act except the last will resolve one suspense and create another. The dramatist must not create suspense artificially by dropping a curtain in the middle of a crucial movement, like the cutting off of a magazine installment of a serial thriller with the hero and villain wrestling in a struggle to the death on the edge of a precipice. So long as the action is continuous it must be allowed to run its course. It is the business of a dramatist to conceive of an action in terms of logical units in each of which one impetus runs its course and gives rise to a new impetus.

The play of three acts is the form most common in our modern commercial theatre. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, five acts was the standard form. The division into acts was first enunciated as a principle of dramatic structure by the Roman poet and critic Horace in his *Art of Poetry*, written in the first century B.C. Horace stated five acts as a rule: normally the first act indicates the general nature of the drama, introduces the characters, and begins the action; the second act leads up to the third, which develops the crisis of the plot; in the fourth the conclusion or catastrophe is prepared, but should by no means be anticipated so as to weaken the effect of the denouement, which is reserved for the fifth act. Horace's rule was based on Roman drama and was only in part justified by the earlier practice of the Greeks. Greek plays are divided into distinct movements by the Choruses, or lyrical parts; a tend-

ency toward five parts is evident, but the number was by no means fixed as a rule. The Elizabethans accepted Roman practice and Horace's formulation, and it was reemphasized in the seventeenth century by French neo-classicism. In the nineteenth century five acts began to give way to four and three. Ibsen wrote plays in five, four, and three acts, with a predominance of three. In recent years, by no rule, but in general practice, three has come more and more to be the standard. Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* has nine acts, however, and there are episodic plays like Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, which is in seven scenes with no act divisions.

The trend to three acts has three causes, two superficial, one fundamental. A three-act play is not necessarily shorter than a five-act play, but it is likely to be, and the modern world is in a hurry, impatient of sustained attention. Modern theatre-goers apparently have less dramatic guts than the Athenians of the fifth century B.C., who came to the theatre at dawn for a day of drama in the annual competitions, and could take a trilogy of tragedies at a sitting; and the Elizabethans, crowds of whom stood in the pit for a three-hour tragedy followed by a jig. Another practical consideration is that of stage setting. The scene for five acts may be the same, and an act of a three-act play might contain five scenes each requiring a different set, but the three-act form arose in the modern realistic stage before still more modern devices for quick scene-shifting were invented. The norm is a continuous scene for each act, and fewer acts meant fewer changes of set.

The development of the three-act form, however, was not entirely a concession to late diners and stage carpenters. Three movements are clearly more basic to the fundamental structure of a dramatic action than Horace's five. There is an attack, a crisis, and a resolution. Either the second or the fourth act of the five-act formula may be superfluous. There is a natural symmetry and balance with adequate flexibility inherent in the three-act form, with the first act introductory and springing the attack, the second act developing the action to the crisis, and the third act for the resolu-

tion. Or, since the movement to the crisis is so often a process of more complications than that to the resolution, the final rise to the crisis may be reserved for the third act, with a more swift and direct movement to the resolution. Whatever the number of acts and the exact distribution of the action, it is practically imperative that the attack come before the curtain falls on the first act if the dramatist wants his audience to return to their seats after the intermission.

The one-act form is not likely to raise the old question of the unities of time and place, although J. M. Barrie did cover many years in the episodic scenes of his one-act play *The Will*. The beginning dramatist, outside academic circles, is not likely to hear much of the classical unities in any case, but he probably will hear a good deal about the one-set play as a practical matter of the theatre. That is the unity of place coming in by the back door, and the unity of time follows on its heels. Hardly anyone neglects to advise the beginner that he should by all means arrange his play for one set if he wants to get it produced. That advice is to a very considerable degree out of date. The modern commercial theatre has achieved flexibility of staging by the way of mechanics, and the amateurs have solved the problem of the many-set play by art and ingenuity. *Grand Hotel* with two wagon stages was an entirely typical modern commercial theatre production, and I have seen an economically staged, flowing, and utterly delightful *Tour du Monde* in an amateur theatre. Nevertheless, the classical unities are very much worth thinking about for the modern theatre.

The unities of time and place as rigid rules are not classical, but neo-classical. In the Greek theatre the majority of dramas did confine the action to a single day, and the scene to one place or adjacent places, although there are extreme exceptions, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, for instance, in which the action moves from Delphi to Athens with a long time intervening, months or even years. Aristotle mentions the former practice flexibly, not as a rule but as generally observed, and does not refer to the latter. Horace, again, was responsible for the formulation adopted by the neo-classicists of the

seventeenth century in France. From France it spread to England, but never became completely acclimated there. The neo-classical logic that it put too great a strain upon the common sense of the audience to ask them to believe they were spanning years and oceans while they sat in one spot for a space of two hours was completely untheatrical. Shakespeare knew better when, in the Prologue to *King Henry V*, he put the responsibility squarely onto the imagination of his audience:

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass.

The theatre cannot exist without conventions, and it is as much a convention for two hours to represent twenty-four, and one spot to represent two scenes within walking distance in that time, as for babes to grow to man and woman and travel from Bohemia to Sicilia, as in *A Winter's Tale*. Above all, the theatre is a place for the imagination. Greek drama grew out of religious festivals in which a chorus was present throughout, and retained the chorus, gradually incorporating it into the action. The fixed element of the chorus exercised an influence toward a convention of narrow limits of time and place, as did the presence of a fixed architectural scenic background. Such unity also came naturally to Greek tragedy by the use of legends familiar to the audience; much could be left to brief reference that would need enactment on the stage for an audience unacquainted with the story. The conditions of the Greek theatre produced the conventions of its drama and its peculiar merits. Out of the characteristic compact unity and economy of Greek tragedy comes the chiseled beauty of construction and concentrated force of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. Out of the freedom of time and place of the Elizabethan theatre Shakespeare created the chaotic grandeur and sweeping power of *King Lear*. Great dramatists utilize the forms that are given to them—and then when genius prompts, with authoritative gesture wave them aside, as when Aeschylus followed the Fury-

driven Orestes from Delphi to Athens in his *Eumenides*, and Shakespeare bound the action of *The Tempest* within a single day and the small circumference of Prospero's magic island. It is significant, however, even of such variations, that the two widely removed scenes of the Greek play, Apollo's shrine and the hill of the Acropolis, are each appropriate to the fixed architectural background of the Greek stage, and that the flexibility of the Elizabethan stage is utilized to the full in the number and variety of the scenes in *The Tempest*, although all are closely adjacent.

The modern theatre is not in the least bound to one set, but it cannot be without significance that an extraordinarily large number of the finest and most successful of recent plays have been one-set plays and exceedingly compact as to time—*Winterset*, *Dead End*, *The End of Summer*, *Rain from Heaven*, *Idiot's Delight*, *Awake and Sing*, *Tobacco Road*, to name only a few. On the other hand, there are *Victoria Regina*, *Johnny Johnson* (hardly a Broadway success, but one of the finest and most interesting of recent plays) and *Yellow Jack*. It will readily be seen that there can be no simple, mechanical classification. *Yellow Jack* covers years and distances, but by a staging device has the unity of effect of a single background. Variety of scene, however, adds liveliness to *Johnny Johnson*. The biographical material of *Victoria Regina* demanded extreme departure from unity of time and place, and unlike *Yellow Jack*, the tone of the play called for realistic set changes; the result showed how right such a play can be for our theatre. Part of the effect of S. N. Behrman's plays *The End of Summer* and *Rain from Heaven* depends upon a contrast between problems of moment and the superficial drawing-room atmosphere. The drawing-room as a single background is essential, and that is a background which does not readily sustain long gaps of time. *Tobacco Road* and *Dead End* are each a play of a place; the single, memorable set is an integral part of the play and adds greatly to its forcefulness, especially for *Dead End*. *Tobacco Road* could be successful on a bare stage, *Dead End* could not. In both these plays the time compression, through two dawns for *Tobacco Road*, from one day to the follow-

ing night for *Dead End*, is a structural accomplishment, and adds to the unity of effect by making the audience feel they are looking in on the place at any short interval and finding it as it has been and will be. *Idiot's Delight* and *Winterset* belong to a different category. The material in neither case demanded the single place or time. The action of each play has magnitude, and takes place in a single evening in *Idiot's Delight* and from a single dawn to night in *Winterset*. The dramatist conceived of a time and place in which the threads of the several lives could be drawn together in mutual crisis. The towering bulk of the bridgehead in *Winterset* is as striking and memorable a set as that of *Dead End*, and is integral to the play as well as good theatre. The place did not, however, make the lives of the characters; their lives have brought them to this place, and their final drama is enacted in its shadow. The masterly construction of the converging of the several lives is a part of the creation of the sense of fate in the play, and the swift continuity of time with which the action progresses from act to act certainly enhances the tension.

In writing the long play, the first job after the writer knows the story he is going to use is blocking it out into acts and scenes. First the main movements must be determined, then what events must be on the stage. Certainly the approach should be, Into how few continuous periods of action can all that is essential be arranged? Then, while mindful of the freedom available if it is needed, it would be well for the beginner to study the practice of so many experienced contemporaries, and consider the possibility of the concentrated and sustained effect of one set and short time intervals. This part of playwriting is pure craftsmanship, ingenuity, manipulation, devices—and persistence at the problem. It is like a problem of mathematics to which there is a solution if one sticks to it. I remember the remark of a young man, now a Broadway dramatist—we were both just out of college then, and he had been thinking of nothing but theatre since before he was in high school. I had suggested that some incident or other would make a better story than

a play. His reply was, "There isn't anything would make a better story than a play; you just have to find the way to make it a play."

In *Winterset*, a good man had been condemned in a mistrial under a biased judge, and executed for a murder of which he was innocent. His son grew up a homeless wanderer under the stigma of his parenthood, obsessed with the idea of avenging his father and clearing his name. The problem of the play is to bring the son in the course of his purpose into contact with a love which will purge his mind and bring him into harmony with the spirit of love above vengeance for his father. There was a vital witness who never was called, who could have cleared Bartolomeo. His evidence would implicate the gangster actually responsible for the murder, and he has been living in hiding and fear of the gangster since. The son, the gangster, and the judge need to be brought together. All three have an interest in the uncalled witness, and his home makes a possible focus for unity of place. The problem of time is still unsolved. A professor of law has been investigating the case and has traced the witness; he publishes an article and mentions the street where the witness is to be found. It is inherent in the positions of the son and the gangster that they should seek out the witness at once, the son to gain his evidence, the gangster to keep him still. The judge is brought to the spot at the same time by a special characterization: he was a man of sensitive conscience and subtle mind who had deceived himself into believing that the trial and judgment were just. Doubt has entered and jarred the delicate machinery of his brain. Half-crazed he seeks out the witness to resolve his doubt. By placing the girl whom the son is to meet and love as the sister of the witness, all of the elements of the play are wrought into the unity of time and place. All this is craftsmanship, but it is the craftsmanship which flowers into art. The characterization of the judge is one of the highest points of the play, and it is upon the peak of carefully drawn converging lines that the fate of Mio and Miriamne is lifted to exaltation.

After the young dramatist has pursued his problem of blocking out the scenes for concentration of the action to the limit of effort, it may turn out that his play should be in eighteen or twenty scenes. If that solution is the right one, it will still be the fewest scenes possible to the material.

X. ANALYSIS OF A LONG PLAY

THERE is no better foundation for dramatic construction than intensive study of the well-known works of Ibsen. He was fifty-one when he wrote *A Doll's House*, in 1879, the first of his "social dramas." It is the plays from *A Doll's House* to his last in 1900 that constitute Ibsen the father of modern drama and in which his genius found fullest realization. Ibsen achieved the characteristic form and content of his drama out of a lifetime of arduous study of the work of his predecessors and practice in the theatre. His successors have reaped the benefit.

Twenty years ago it was being whispered that Ibsen's plays were commencing "to date," that is, beginning to be of interest only as period pieces. He had written problem plays, and the problems had been solved and were no longer of vital interest, it was said. Every mode—in drama or in hats or furniture—always looks out of date for a period immediately following. Then a little distance gives perspective, and what is substantially good reasserts itself. With revivals of *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, and *A Doll's House*, all successful, and *A Doll's House* one of the hits of the year, Ibsen seems to be more alive in our theatre the past three years than ever before. The basic reason, of course, is that Ibsen made character the heart of his drama. In writing a problem play, he subordinated thesis to consistency of character; the general social problem is always the problem of a living individual, and developed accordingly. In the resolution of *A Doll's House* when Nora leaves her husband, home, and children, there is no implication that that is the solution for every wife in whom self-realization as an individual is being stifled by marriage; it is the course for Nora because of what she is, what Helmer is, and all the individual circumstances of their lives.

Because of the place Ibsen gave to character in his drama, there is always a problem of moral values and integrity underlying the immediate social problem; crucial decision and exercise of will are demanded, and that is the enduring stuff of drama. When Ibsen created the endearing character of Nora, the child-wife who was suddenly called upon to grow up in an hour, he assured permanence to his play. Whether Nora's decision was right or wrong, when her universe crashed about her, unaccustomed to decisions as she was, she stood up and used all the powers of mind and feeling and will she possessed; the decision was the inevitable one for her. And whether Nora's problem matters to people in the audience directly or not, what the problem means to Nora matters a great deal to them.

Actually the problems of most of Ibsen's plays are by no means out of date. Solved problems have a way of raising their heads again. For *A Doll's House*, no longer because of masculine egotism and dominance certainly, but out of new conditions since woman's supposed emancipation, self-realization for wives seems to be one of the most acute problems of today. No current problem-play this past year sent the audience out of the theatre in more of a buzz of discussion than the revival of *A Doll's House*. Finally, the underlying moral values of Ibsen's plays cannot date; smugness, hypocrisy, compromise, egocentricness, individual integrity, do not belong to one time. The basic drama even comes through with more clarity when the agitation over the particular thesis is less acute. *Ghosts* in this last revival with Madame Nazimova's interpretation of Mrs. Alving assumed a new stature and dignity as pure drama.

Structurally, *A Doll's House* is one of the simpler of Ibsen's later plays, with a special clarity of outline that makes it especially valuable for an introductory analysis. Special attention should be given to the manner in which he integrates the exposition, both of immediate situation and of antecedent material, with the dramatic movement. *A Doll's House* is a one-set play, with each of the three acts a single continuous scene. The skill with which Ibsen brought everything essential onto the stage in three well-organized and

continuous movements should be noted. In plays long or short, one of the technical problems is getting characters on and off stage as they are wanted, naturally without abruptness, and with dramatic effect. The problem is multiplied and more acute in the long play. *A Doll's House* offers opportunity for study of careful handling of the problem.

TEXT AND ANALYSIS
of
A DOLL'S HOUSE

By Henrik Ibsen

A DOLL'S HOUSE

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

TORVALD HELMER.

NORA, *his wife*.

DOCTOR RANK.

MRS. LINDE.

NILS KROGSTAD.

HELMER'S THREE YOUNG CHILDREN.

ANNE, *their nurse*.

A HOUSEMAID.

A PORTER.

The action takes place in Helmer's house.

ACT I

SCENE—A room furnished comfortably and tastefully but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond a window. Near the window are a round table, armchairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove. It is winter.

⁽¹⁾ A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in out-door dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carry-

A DOLL'S HOUSE

ANALYSIS

ACT I

(1) One of the practical problems of opening a play for actual theatre conditions is that of getting the wandering attention of the audience settled to the stage. The problem is well solved here: the empty stage creates expectation, the off-stage sounds of the bell and opening door increase expectation; Nora's entrance in a definite mood, obviously projected by her humming a tune, creates a question, why is she in high spirits? The stage business and inconsequential lines with the porter draw the attention of the audience and get them quiet for the first line of significance, from Helmer. Nora's act of listening at the door introduces the presence of another person and creates expectation. The Christmas tree business introduces the light-hearted, happy mood which is to suffer reversal.

ing a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.

NORA. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it till this evening, when it is dressed. [*To the PORTER, taking out purse.*] How much?

POR. Sixpence.

NORA. There is a shilling. No, keep the change. [*The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.*] Yes, he is in. [*Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.*]⁽¹⁾

⁽²⁾HEL. [*calls out from his room*]. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

NORA [*busy opening some of the parcels*]. Yes, it is!

HEL. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

NORA. Yes!

HEL. When did my squirrel come home?⁽²⁾

NORA. Just now. ⁽³⁾[*Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.*]⁽³⁾ Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

⁽⁴⁾HEL. Don't disturb me. [*A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.*] ⁽⁵⁾Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

NORA. Yes, but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

HEL. Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

NORA. Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

HEL. Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

⁽⁶⁾NORA. Pooh! we can borrow till then.

HEL. Nora! [*Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.*] The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that

(2) Introduces the "lark and squirrel" theme, the relation between Helmer and Nora.

(3) With the previous macaroon business, introduces the stage-property and action necessary as preparation for Nora's fibbing about the macaroons later.

(4) Introduces the attitude of self-importance of Helmer.

(5) The discussion of money which begins here is a dramatic action at this point, a minor conflict between Nora and Helmer. At the same time it is exposition of Helmer's new position and financial status, and Nora's eagerness for money foreshadows the explicit exposition later of her special use for money.

(6) Prepares for Nora's having borrowed money secretly.

I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and—

NORA [*putting her hands over his mouth*]. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

⁽⁷⁾HEL. Still, suppose that happened—what then?

NORA. If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

HEL. Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

NORA. They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.⁽⁷⁾

HEL. That is like a woman! ⁽⁸⁾But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

NORA [*moving towards the stove*]. As you please, Torvald.

HEL. [*following her*]. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? [*Taking out his purse.*] Nora, what do you think I have got here?

NORA [*turning round quickly*]. Money!

HEL. There you are. [*Gives her some money.*] Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time?⁽⁸⁾

NORA [*counting*]. Ten shillings—a pound—two pounds! Thank you, thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

HEL. Indeed it must.

NORA. Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy—they are very plain, but anyways she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better.

HEL. And what is in this parcel?

(7) Introduction of a contrast which runs through the play between men's and women's points of view, men accustomed to thinking in terms of abstract principles, women governed by personal relations and affections, or aversions.

(8) The relation between Helmer and Nora: he lectures paternally, she acts the part of a spoiled child to get what she wants, and he responds like an indulgent father.

NORA [*crying out*]. No, no! you mustn't see that till this evening.

⁽⁹⁾HEL. Very well. But now tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?

NORA. For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

HEL. Yes, but you must. Tell me something reasonable that you would particularly like to have.

NORA. No, I really can't think of anything—unless, Torvald—

HEL. Well?

NORA [*playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his*]. If you really want to give me something, you might—you might—

HEL. Well, out with it!

NORA [*speaking quickly*]. You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

HEL. But, Nora—

NORA. Oh, do! dear Torvald; please, please do! Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas Tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

HEL. What are little people called that are always wasting money?

NORA. Spendthrifts—I know. Let us do as you suggest, Torvald, and then I shall have time to think what I am most in want of. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

HEL. [*smiling*]. Indeed it is—that is to say, if you were really to save out of the money I give you, and then really buy something for yourself. But if you spend it all on the housekeeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

NORA. Oh, but, Torvald—

HEL. You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. [*Puts his arm around her waist.*] It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money. One would hardly believe how expensive such little persons are!

NORA. It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

(9) The irony, as appears later, of Helmer's indulgent idea of Nora as light-headed and extravagant. He enjoys thinking of her in that way, as it enhances his own sense of superiority. Since Helmer has never recognized Nora as having a mind, she has accustomed herself to devising little tricks by which to get what she wants. Nora really enjoys being Helmer's little skylark and squirrel too. Her preference for money to any other gift prepares for the later exposition of her use for money.

HEL. [*laughing*]. That's very true—all you can. But you can't save anything!⁽⁹⁾

⁽¹⁰⁾NORA [*smiling quietly and happily*]. You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.⁽¹⁰⁾

⁽¹¹⁾HEL. You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.⁽¹¹⁾

NORA. Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa's qualities.

HEL. And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark. ⁽¹²⁾But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather—what shall I say—rather uneasy today?

NORA. Do I?

HEL. You do, really. Look straight at me.

NORA [*looks at him*]. Well?

HEL. [*wagging his finger at her*]. Hasn't Miss Sweet-Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

NORA. No; what makes you think that?

HEL. Hasn't she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

NORA. No, I assure you, Torvald—

HEL. Not been nibbling sweets?

NORA. No, certainly not.

HEL. Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?

NORA. No, Torvald, I assure you really—

HEL. There, there, of course I was only joking.

NORA [*going to the table on the right*]. I should not think of going against your wishes.

HEL. No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word—[*going up to her*].⁽¹²⁾ Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will all be revealed to-night when the Christmas Tree is lit, no doubt.

⁽¹³⁾NORA. Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

HEL. No. But there is no need; as a matter of course he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes in this morning.⁽¹³⁾ I have ordered some good wine.

(10) Prepares for the joy Nora has experienced in her independent and secret experience of responsibility, work, and sacrifice for love.

(11) Ibsen and Charles Darwin were contemporaries, that is, Ibsen lived in the midst of the great nineteenth-century advance in scientific knowledge of the biology of human life, and was strongly influenced by the movement. He was especially attracted by the idea of heredity, in which he saw an element of unalterable circumstance for the struggle of the individual will which offered a rational basis for the concept of Fate in drama. The theme of heredity is not vital to *A Doll's House*, but contributes a dramatic emphasis in Helmer's and Nora's final discussion which is prepared for here.

(12) Nora's little white lie about the macaroons develops the indulgent father and spoiled child relation between her and Helmer, and prepares for Nora's concealments in the important matter of Krogstad.

(13) Casual introduction of Dr. Rank and his relation to the household.

Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

NORA. So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

⁽¹⁴⁾HEL. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn't it?

NORA. It's wonderful!⁽¹⁴⁾

⁽¹⁵⁾HEL. Do you remember last Christmas? For a full three weeks beforehand you shut yourself up every evening till long after midnight, making ornaments for the Christmas Tree and all the other fine things that were to be a surprise to us. It was the dullest three weeks I ever spent!

NORA. I didn't find it dull.

HEL. [*smiling*]. But there was precious little result, Nora.

NORA. Oh, you shouldn't tease me about that again. How could I help the cat's going in and tearing everything to pieces?⁽¹⁵⁾

HEL. Of course you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing. But it is a good thing that our hard times are over.

NORA. Yes, it is really wonderful.

HEL. This time I needn't sit here and be dull all alone, and you needn't ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands—

NORA [*clapping her hands*]. No, Torvald, I needn't any longer, need I! It's wonderfully lovely to hear you say so! [*Taking his arm.*] ⁽¹⁶⁾Now I will tell you how I have been thinking we ought to arrange things, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over— [*A bell rings in the hall.*] There's the bell. [*She tidies the room a little.*] There's someone at the door. What a nuisance!⁽¹⁶⁾

HEL. If it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

MAID [*in the doorway*]. A lady to see you, ma'am—a stranger.

NORA. Ask her to come in.

⁽¹⁷⁾MAID [*to HELMER*]. The doctor came at the same time, sir.

HEL. Did he go straight into my room?

(14) Develops the feeling of security preparatory to reversal.

(15) Prepares for the later explanation of Nora's activity in retirement, and her enjoyment of an independent serious action, self-realization as an individual.

(16) Illusion of naturalness in the entrance of Mrs. Linde; the bell interrupts Nora in the middle of a sentence which introduced a new topic with all the appearance of continuation.

(17) Dr. Rank introduced into the house here for the casualness of his later appearance. At the same time it is a device for getting Helmer off-stage and clearing the stage for the scene between Nora and Mrs. Linde, and for bringing Krogstad directly in to Nora later without seeing Helmer. Mrs. Linde's act of closing the door prepares for confidential conversation.

MAID. Yes, sir.

[*HEL. goes into his room. The MAID ushers in Mrs. LINDE, who is in traveling dress, and shuts the door.*]⁽¹⁷⁾

MRS. L. [*in a dejected and timid voice*]. How do you do, Nora?

NORA [*doubtfully*]. How do you do—

MRS. L. You don't recognize me, I suppose.

NORA. No, I don't know—yes, to be sure, I seem to—
[*Suddenly.*] Yes! Christine! Is it really you?

MRS. L. Yes, it is I.

NORA. Christine! To think of my not recognizing you! And yet how could I— [*In a gentle voice.*] How you have altered, Christine!

MRS. L. Yes, I have indeed. In nine, ten long years—

NORA. Is it so long since we met? I suppose it is.⁽¹⁸⁾ The last eight years have been a happy time for me, I can tell you.⁽¹⁸⁾ And so now you have come into the town, and have taken this long journey in winter—that was plucky of you.

MRS. L. I arrived by steamer this morning.

NORA. To have some fun at Christmas-time, of course. How delightful! We will have such fun together! But take off your things. You are not cold, I hope. [*Helps her.*] Now we will sit down by the stove, and be cozy. No, take this arm-chair; I will sit here in the rocking-chair. [*Takes her hands.*] Now you look like your old self again; it was only the first moment— You are a little paler, Christine, and perhaps a little thinner.

MRS. L. And much, much older, Nora.

NORA. Perhaps a little older; very, very little; certainly not much.⁽¹⁹⁾ [*Stops suddenly and speaks seriously.*] What a thoughtless creature I am, chattering away like this. My poor, dear Christine, do forgive me.⁽¹⁹⁾

MRS. L. What do you mean, Nora?

⁽²⁰⁾NORA [*gently*]. Poor Christine, you are a widow.

MRS. L. Yes; it is three years ago now.

NORA. Yes, I knew; I saw it in the papers. I assure you, Christine, I meant ever so often to write to you at the time, but I always put it off and something always prevented me.

MRS. L. I quite understand, dear.

- (18) Develops Nora's happiness for reversal.
- (19) Nora's loveliness.
- (20) Antecedent material concerning Mrs. Linde which is necessary to explain her relation to Krogstad later.

NORA. It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing.

MRS. L. No.

NORA. And no children?

MRS. L. No.

NORA. Nothing at all, then?

MRS. L. Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon.

NORA [*looking incredulously at her*]. But, Christine, is that possible?

MRS. L. [*smiles sadly and strokes her hair*]. It sometimes happens, Nora.⁽²⁰⁾

⁽²¹⁾NORA. So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children.⁽²¹⁾ You can't see them just now, for they are out with their nurse. But now you must tell me all about it.

MRS. L. No, no; I want to hear about you.

NORA. No, you must begin. I mustn't be selfish today; today I must only think of your affairs. But there is one thing I must tell you. Do you know we have just had a great piece of good luck?

MRS. L. No, what is it?

NORA. Just fancy, my husband has been made manager of the Bank!

MRS. L. Your husband? What good luck!

NORA. Yes, tremendous! ⁽²²⁾A barrister's profession is such an uncertain thing, especially if he won't undertake unsavory cases; and naturally Torvald has never been willing to do that, and I quite agree with him.⁽²²⁾ You may imagine how pleased we are! He is to take up his work in the Bank at the New Year, and then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions. ⁽²³⁾For the future we can live quite differently—we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and so happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?

MRS. L. Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

NORA. No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.⁽²³⁾

(21) Prepares for the degree of attachment of Nora to those she loves, upon which the force of the resolution depends.

(22) Introduces Helmer's attitudes of rigid integrity, and shows the unity of Nora with her husband.

(23) Nora's excitement and sense of release over the expansion of fortune leads naturally to the confidences that follow about past difficulties. The purpose of the scene with Mrs. Linde is exposition of antecedent material preparatory to the attack. The details are introduced gradually, each successive stage of revelation prompted by a natural emotional impulse. The audience is gaining acquaintance with the character of Nora at the same time.

MRS. L. [*smiling*]. Nora, Nora, haven't you learnt sense yet? In our schooldays you were a great spendthrift.

NORA [*laughing*]. Yes, that is what Torvald says now. [*Wags her finger at her.*] But "Nora, Nora" is not so silly as you think. We have not been in a position for me to waste money. We have both had to work.

MRS. L. You too?

NORA. Yes; odds and ends, needlework, crochet-work, embroidery, and that kind of thing. [*Dropping her voice.*] And other things as well. ⁽²⁴⁾ You know Torvald left his office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he overworked himself dreadfully. You see, he had to make money every way he could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand it, and fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south. ⁽²⁴⁾

MRS. L. You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

NORA. Yes. It was no easy matter to get away, I can tell you. It was just after Ivar was born; but naturally we had to go. It was a wonderfully beautiful journey, and it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a tremendous lot of money, Christine.

MRS. L. So I should think.

NORA. It cost about two hundred and fifty pounds. That's a lot, isn't it?

MRS. L. Yes, and in emergencies like that it is lucky to have the money.

NORA. I ought to tell you that we had it from papa.

⁽²⁵⁾ MRS. L. Oh, I see. It was just about that time that he died, wasn't it?

NORA. Yes; and, just think of it, I couldn't go and nurse him. I was expecting little Ivar's birth every day and I had my poor sick Torvald to look after. My dear, kind father—I never saw him again, Christine. That was the saddest time I have known since our marriage.

MRS. L. I know how fond you were of him. And then you went off to Italy?

(24) A favorable aspect of Helmer's character. A director should never attempt to enhance Nora's character by presenting Helmer unattractively—the likely direction is for him to be played too pompously. Helmer has a core of weakness in him which is laid bare by a crisis, but if he were not outwardly attractive and possessed of obvious good qualities, Nora would appear only as a little fool to have been so devoted to him, diminished in character instead of enhanced. Helmer is a big handsome man possessed of industry, integrity, faith in principles, and a passion for perfection. He is also vain and self-centered, and because of his self-centeredness he lacks courage in a crisis, and he thinks of appearances above actuality. His only failure of integrity is with himself, in concealing from himself his own weaknesses.

(25) Preparation for introduction of the significance of the time of Nora's father's death.

NORA. Yes; you see we had money then, and the doctors insisted on our going, so we started a month later.⁽²⁵⁾

⁽²⁶⁾MRS. L. And your husband came back quite well?

NORA. As sound as a bell!

MRS. L. But—the doctor?

NORA. What doctor?

MRS. L. I thought your maid said the gentleman who arrived here just as I did, was the doctor?

NORA. Yes, that was Doctor Rank, but he doesn't come here professionally. He is our greatest friend, and comes in at least once every day.⁽²⁶⁾ No, Torvald has not had an hour's illness since then, and our children are strong and healthy and so am I.⁽²⁷⁾ [*Jumps up and claps her hands.*] Christine! Christine! it's good to be alive and happy!⁽²⁷⁾ But how horrid of me; I am talking of nothing but my own affairs. [*Sits on a stool near her, and rests her arms on her knees.*] You mustn't be angry with me. Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

MRS. L. My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer.

NORA. No, perhaps you were quite right. He was rich at that time, then?

MRS. L. I believe he was quite well off. But his business was a precarious one; and, when he died, it all went to pieces and there was nothing left.

NORA. And then?—

MRS. L. Well, I had to turn my hand to anything I could find—first a small shop, then a small school, and so on. The last three years have seemed like one long working-day, with no rest. Now it is at an end, Nora. My poor mother needs me no more, for she is gone; and the boys do not need me either; they have got situations and can shift for themselves.

⁽²⁸⁾NORA. What a relief you must feel it—

MRS. L. No, indeed; I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for any more.⁽²⁸⁾ [*Gets up restlessly.*] That was why I could not stand the life in my little back-water any longer. I hope it may be easier here to find some-

(26) A device for keeping Dr. Rank in the audience's mind and further acquainting them with his relation to the household.

(27) Nora's joy of living, which is one of her endearing traits, and which gives pathos to the reversal, particularly to her thought of suicide.

(28) As a negative variation on the theme, accents Nora's joy in devotion to Helmer.

thing which will busy me and occupy my thoughts. ⁽²⁹⁾ If only I could have the good luck to get some regular work—office work of some kind—⁽²⁹⁾

NORA. But, Christine, that is so frightfully tiring, and you look tired out now. You had far better go away to some watering-place.

MRS. L. [*walking to the window*]. I have no father to give me money for a journey, Nora.

NORA [*rising*]. Oh, don't be angry with me.

MRS. L. [*going up to her*]. It is you that must not be angry with me, dear. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so bitter. No one to work for, and yet obliged to be always on the look-out for chances. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken—you will hardly believe it—I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own.

NORA. How do you mean?—Oh, I understand. You mean that perhaps Torvald could get you something to do.

MRS. L. Yes, that was what I was thinking of.

⁽³⁰⁾ NORA. He must, Christine. Just leave it to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly—I will think of something that will please him very much. ⁽³⁰⁾ It will make me so happy to be of some use to you.

⁽³¹⁾ MRS. L. How kind you are, Nora, to be so anxious to help me! It is doubly kind in you, for you know so little of the burdens and troubles of life.

NORA. I—? I know so little of them?

MRS. L. [*smiling*]. My dear! Small household cares and that sort of thing!—You are a child, Nora.

NORA [*tosses her head and crosses the stage*]. You ought not to be so superior.

MRS. L. No?

NORA. You are just like the others. They all think that I am incapable of anything really serious—

MRS. L. Come, come—

NORA. —that I have gone through nothing in this world of cares.

(29) The plan of asking Helmer to find a place for Mrs. Linde in the bank becomes involved as a complication later with Krogstad's dismissal and his attack on Nora. It is introduced here very casually.

(30) As a result of Helmer's attitude toward Nora of never recognizing her mind, she has become accustomed to living in the world of her own desires, "working him" for what she wants as some children do a parent. This is preparation for her following the same course with Helmer in relation to Krogstad.

(31) Only by what they have endured or surmounted can people offer evidence of their strength. That is why so many people seem to take a pride and satisfaction in their troubles, why women vie with one another in accounts of their operations. Most people resist being told they have had an easier life than someone else. Ibsen has given a most natural emotional impetus here to Nora's fuller revelation of antecedent material.

MRS. L. But, my dear Nora, you have just told me all your troubles.

NORA. Pooh!—those were trifles. [*Lowering her voice.*] I have not told you the important thing.

MRS. L. The important thing? What do you mean?

NORA. You look down upon me altogether, Christine—but you ought not to. You are proud, aren't you, of having worked so hard and so long for your mother?⁽³¹⁾

MRS. L. Indeed, I don't look down on anyone. But it is true that I am both proud and glad to think that I was privileged to make the end of my mother's life almost free from care.

NORA. And you are proud to think of what you have done for your brothers.

MRS. L. I think I have the right to be.

NORA. I think so, too. But now, listen to this; I too have something to be proud and glad of.

MRS. L. I have no doubt you have. But what do you refer to?

⁽³²⁾NORA. Speak low. Suppose Torvald were to hear! He mustn't on any account—no one in the world must know, Christine, except you.⁽³²⁾

MRS. L. But what is it?

NORA. Come here. [*Pulls her down on the sofa beside her.*] Now I will show you that I too have something to be proud and glad of. ⁽³³⁾It was I who saved Torvald's life.⁽³³⁾

MRS. L. "Saved"? How?

NORA. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered if he had not gone there—

MRS. L. Yes, but your father gave you the necessary funds.

NORA [*smiling*]. Yes, that is what Torvald and the others think, but—

MRS. L. But—

NORA. Papa didn't give us a shilling. It was I who procured the money.

MRS. L. You? All that large sum?

NORA. Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you think of that?

(32) It is especially natural for Nora to tell her secret to Mrs. Linde. She has kept the secret completely to herself for years and needs to tell someone, just one person. Mrs. Linde, by their former relation, revives in Nora the girlhood feeling for confidences; also, people will often tell more of themselves to someone who is somewhat detached than to someone in intimate relation.

This speech of Nora's introduces the first question of the play. A long play normally starts off in slower tempo than a short play. The introduction to this point has created expectation because Nora is made interesting as a person from the moment of her entrance, and an interesting relation to her husband is immediately made evident. Very little of dramatic situation has been presented, only the fact of Helmer's new position; Nora and Helmer have been introduced in their character relation to each other, and the carefree mood for reversal has been established. At this point Ibsen creates by Nora's attitude considerable suspense over the introduction of antecedent material.

(33) Nora's announcement of what she has to tell justifies her attitude of importance and intensifies the question.

MRS. L. But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? Did you win a prize in the Lottery?

NORA [*contemptuously*]. In the Lottery? There would have been no credit in that.

MRS. L. But where did you get it from, then?

NORA [*humming and smiling with an air of mystery*]. Hm, hm! Aha!

MRS. L. Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

NORA. Couldn't I? Why not?

MRS. L. No, a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent.

NORA [*tossing her head*]. Oh, if it is a wife who has any head for business—a wife who has the wit to be a little bit clever—

MRS. L. I don't understand it at all, Nora.

NORA. There is no need you should. I never said I had borrowed the money. ⁽⁸⁴⁾I may have got it some other way. [*Lies back on the sofa.*] Perhaps I got it from some other admirers. When anyone is as attractive as I am—⁽⁸⁴⁾

MRS. L. You are a mad creature.

NORA. Now, you know you're full of curiosity, Christine.

MRS. L. Listen to me, Nora dear. Haven't you been a little bit imprudent?

⁽⁸⁵⁾NORA [*sits up straight*]. Is it imprudent to save your husband's life?

MRS. L. It seems to me imprudent, without his knowledge, to—

NORA. But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness, can't you understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition he was in. It was to me that the doctors came and said that his life was in danger, and that the only thing to save him was to live in the south. Do you suppose I didn't try, first of all, to get what I wanted as if it were for myself? I told him how much I should love to travel abroad like other young wives; I tried tears and entreaties with him; I told him that he ought to remember the condition I was in, and that he ought to be kind and indulgent to me; I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Chris-

(34) The spoiled child again; Nora has been taught to be aware of her attractiveness and to depend primarily upon it even with her husband. Prepares for the attempt later to solve her problem through Dr. Rank.

(35) The earnest Nora again, and evidence of her usually latent capacity of decision and will. Without such a decisive action under a crisis in her past, Nora's strength at the end of the play would not be convincing. The basis of Nora's logic throughout appears here: whatever is dictated by love is right; everything else is secondary.

tine. He said I was thoughtless, and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims and caprices—as I believe he called them. Very well, I thought, you must be saved—and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty—⁽⁸⁵⁾

MRS. L. And did your husband never get to know from your father that the money had not come from him?

NORA. No, never. Papa died just at that time. I had meant to let him into the secret and beg him never to reveal it. But he was so ill then—alas, there never was any need to tell him.

MRS. L. And since then have you never told your secret to your husband?

NORA. Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now.

MRS. L. Do you mean never to tell him about it?

NORA [*meditatively, and with a half smile*]. Yes—some day, perhaps, after many years, when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. Don't laugh at me! ⁽⁸⁶⁾I mean, of course, when Torvald is no longer as devoted to me as he is now; when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve—⁽⁸⁶⁾ [*Breaking off.*] What nonsense! That time will never come. Now, what do you think of my great secret, Christine? Do you still think I am of no use? ⁽⁸⁷⁾I can tell you, too, that this affair has caused me a lot of worry. It has been by no means easy for me to meet my engagements punctually. I may tell you that there is something that is called in business, quarterly interest, and another thing called payment in instalments, and it is always so dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had to save a little here and there, where I could, you understand. I have not been able to put aside much from my housekeeping money, for Torvald must have a good table. I couldn't let my chil-

(36) Foreshadows the idea of "a doll's house."

(37) Nora is shown as being capable, underneath her "skylark and squirrel" exterior, of sustained, self-directed activity and seriousness, which prepares for the way in which she meets the crisis of her life. At the same time her lack of development is shown in the naïveté about her business transaction, and her sense of greatest hardship, that she was deprived of the delight of being really well dressed.

dren be shabbily dressed; I have felt obliged to use up all he gave me for them, the sweet little darlings!

Mrs. L. So it has all had to come out of your own necessities of life, poor Nora?

NORA. Of course. Besides, I was the one responsible for it. Whenever Torvald has given me money for new dresses and such things, I have never spent more than half of it; I have always bought the simplest and cheapest things. Thank Heaven, any clothes look well on me, and so Torvald has never noticed it. But it was often very hard on me, Christine—because it is delightful to be really well dressed, isn't it?⁽³⁷⁾

Mrs. L. Quite so.

⁽³⁸⁾NORA. Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.⁽³⁸⁾

Mrs. L. How much have you been able to pay off in that way?

⁽³⁹⁾NORA. I can't tell you exactly. You see, it is very difficult to keep an account of a business matter of that kind. I only know that I have paid every penny that I could scrape together.⁽³⁹⁾ Many a time I was at my wits' end. [*Smiles.*] ⁽⁴⁰⁾Then I used to sit here and imagine that a rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me—

Mrs. L. What! Who was it?

NORA. Be quiet!—that he had died; and that when his will was opened it contained, written in big letters, the instruction: "The lovely Mrs. Nora Helmer is to have all I possess paid over to her at once in cash."

Mrs. L. But, my dear Nora—who could the man be?

NORA. Good gracious, can't you understand? There was no old gentleman at all; it was only something that I used to sit here and imagine, when I couldn't think of any way of procuring money.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But it's all the same now; the tiresome old person can stay where he is, as far as I am concerned; I

(38) The theme of the play, the importance of self-realization as an individual, is being built up here in Nora's naïve pleasure in working and earning money like a man.

(39) With this conclusion of the account of the business transaction to Mrs. Linde, the most vital point in the antecedent material is reserved for introduction in the scene with Krogstad. In that scene the antecedent material is no longer introductory, but the center of the immediate conflict, the past coming to life in the present and creating drama.

(40) This bit of fairy-story creation of Nora's not only helps to characterize her, but is psychological preparation for her thought of seeking aid from Dr. Rank later.

don't care about him or his will either, for I am free from care now. ⁽⁴¹⁾[*Jumps up.*] My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip—perhaps I shall see the sea again! Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy. ⁽⁴¹⁾[*A bell is heard in the hall.*]

MRS. L. [*rising*]. There is the bell; perhaps I had better go.

⁽⁴²⁾NORA. No, don't go; no one will come in here; it is sure to be for Torvald. ⁽⁴²⁾

SERVANT [*at the hall door*]. Excuse me, ma'am—there is a gentleman to see the master, and as the doctor is with him—

NORA. Who is it?

⁽⁴³⁾KROG. [*at the door*]. It is I, Mrs. Helmer. [MRS. LINDE starts, trembles, and turns to the window.]

NORA [*takes a step toward him, and speaks in a strained, low voice*]. You? What is it? What do you want to see my husband about?

KROG. Bank business—in a way. I have a small post in the Bank, and I hear your husband is to be our chief now.

NORA. Then it is—

KROG. Nothing but dry business matters, Mrs. Helmer; absolutely nothing else.

NORA. Be so good as to go into the study, then. [*She bows indifferently to him and shuts the door into the hall; then comes back and makes up the fire in the stove.*]

MRS. L. Nora—who was that man?

NORA. A lawyer, of the name of Krogstad.

MRS. L. Then it really was he.

NORA. Do you know the man?

MRS. L. I used to—many years ago. At one time he was a solicitor's clerk in our town.

NORA. Yes, he was.

MRS. L. He is greatly altered.

(41) Nora's joy of life is brought to a climax here to prepare a dramatic contrast for the interruption by the bell, and the appearance of Krogstad.

(42) Nora's casual unconsciousness of impending danger to her new freedom from care adds to the dramatic contrast and shock.

(43) The interruption from Krogstad is a complication in preparation for the attack. It keeps his entrance to Nora later from appearance of artificial manipulation, introduces the conflicting mood in the play, prepares in both Mrs. Linde's and Nora's reactions at his appearance for revelation later of their relations to him, and creates question and suspense which is held poised through the following scene with Dr. Rank. Opportunity is given for introducing some antecedent details concerning Krogstad naturally and under tension.

NORA. He made a very unhappy marriage.

MRS. L. He is a widower now, isn't he?

NORA. With several children. There now, it is burning up. [*Shuts the door of the stove and moves the rocking-chair aside.*]

MRS. L. They say he carries on various kinds of business.

NORA. Really! Perhaps he does; I don't know anything about it. But don't let us think of business; it is so tiresome.⁽⁴³⁾

⁽⁴⁴⁾DOCTOR RANK [*comes out of HELMER's study. Before he shuts the door he calls to him*]. No, my dear fellow, I won't disturb you; I would rather go in to your wife for a little while.⁽⁴⁴⁾ [*Shuts the door and sees MRS. LINDE.*] I beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you too.

NORA. No, not at all. [*Introducing him.*] Doctor Rank, Mrs. Linde.

RANK. I have often heard Mrs. Linde's name mentioned here. I think I passed you on the stairs when I arrived, Mrs. Linde?

MRS. L. Yes, I go up very slowly; I can't manage stairs well.

RANK. Ah! some slight internal weakness?

MRS. L. No, the fact is I have been overworking myself.

RANK. Nothing more than that? Then I suppose you have come to town to amuse yourself with our entertainments?

MRS. L. I have come to look for work.

RANK. Is that a good cure for overwork.

MRS. L. One must live, Doctor Rank.

RANK. Yes, the general opinion seems to be that it is necessary.

NORA. Look here, Doctor Rank—you know you want to live.

RANK. Certainly. ⁽⁴⁵⁾However wretched I may feel, I want to prolong the agony as long as possible. All my patients are like that. ⁽⁴⁶⁾And so are those who are morally diseased; one of them, and a bad case too, is at this very moment with Helmer—

MRS. L. [*sadly*]. Ah!

(44) Naturalness for Dr. Rank's entrance has been prepared for by knowledge of his intimate relation to the family and that he was in Helmer's study.

(45) Prepares for Dr. Rank's disease and death.

(46) Exposition of Krogstad. The idea of moral disease, like that of heredity, is another instance of the working in Ibsen's mind of recently developed fields of knowledge and concepts of his time. The point of view on Krogstad is important because it keeps his reform from seeming artificial or sentimental: diseased character is subject to restoration to health.

NORA. Whom do you mean?

RANK. A lawyer of the name of Krogstad, a fellow you don't know at all. He suffers from a diseased moral character, Mrs. Helmer; but even he began talking of its being highly important that he should live.

NORA. Did he? What did he want to speak to Torvald about?

RANK. I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the Bank.

NORA. I didn't know this—what's his name—Krogstad had anything to do with the Bank.⁽⁴⁶⁾

RANK. Yes, he has some sort of appointment there. [To MRS. LINDE.] I don't know whether you find also in your part of the world that there are certain people who go zealously snuffing about to smell out moral corruption, and, as soon as they have found some, put the person concerned into some lucrative position where they can keep their eye on him. Healthy natures are left out in the cold.

MRS. L. Still I think the sick are those who most need taking care of.

⁽⁴⁷⁾RANK [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Yes, there you are. That is the sentiment that is turning Society into a sickhouse.

[NORA, *who has been absorbed in her thoughts, breaks out into smothered laughter and claps her hands.*]

RANK. Why do you laugh at that? Have you any notion what Society really is?

NORA. What do I care about tiresome Society?⁽⁴⁷⁾ I am laughing at something quite different, something extremely amusing. ⁽⁴⁸⁾Tell me, Doctor Rank, are all the people who are employed in the Bank dependent on Torvald now?

RANK. Is that what you find so extremely amusing?

NORA [*smiling and humming*]. That's my affair! [*Walking about the room.*] It's perfectly glorious to think that we have—that Torvald has so much power over so many people. [*Takes the packet from her pocket.*] Doctor Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

RANK. What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

NORA. Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

(47) Society with a capital letter represents another of the new concepts which interested Ibsen. Its casual introduction is made good use of here to bring out the woman's point of view again, the remoteness to Nora's mind of abstractions.

(48) Develops the question of Nora's relation to Krogstad. Nora's expression of exuberance through the forbidden sweet and another careless fib is an especially lively touch in the presentation of the childlike aspect of her character.

MRS. L. What! I?—

NORA. Oh, well, don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. I must tell you that he is afraid they will spoil my teeth. But, bah!—once in a way—That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank? By your leave! [*Puts a macaroon into his mouth.*] You must have one too, Christine. And I shall have one, just a little one—or at most two. [*Walking about.*] I am tremendously happy. There is just one thing in the world now that I should dearly love to do.

RANK. Well, what is that?

NORA. It's something I should dearly love to say, if Torvald could hear me.

RANK. Well, why can't you say it?

NORA. No, I daren't; it's so shocking.

MRS. L. Shocking?

RANK. Well, I should not advise you to say it. Still, with us you might. What is it you would so much like to say if Torvald could hear you?

NORA. I should just love to say—Well, I'm damned!⁽⁴⁸⁾

RANK. Are you mad?

MRS. L. Nora, dear—!

RANK. Say it, here he is!

NORA [*hiding the packet*]. Hush! Hush! Hush! [*HELMER comes out of his room, with his coat over his arm and his hat in his hand.*]

NORA. Well, Torvald dear, have you got rid of him?

HEL. Yes, he has just gone.

NORA. Let me introduce you—this is Christine, who has come to town.

HEL. Christine—? Excuse me, but I don't know—

NORA. Mrs. Linde, dear; Christine Linde.

HEL. Of course. A school friend of my wife's, I presume?

MRS. L. Yes, we have known each other since then.

NORA. And just think, she has taken a long journey in order to see you.

HEL. What do you mean?

MRS. L. No, really, I—

⁽⁴⁹⁾NORA. Christine is tremendously clever at bookkeeping,

(49) Nora knows exactly how best to work Helmer for whatever she wants, by playing on his vanity. Helmer's responsiveness to such appeal is unfailing throughout the play. Ibsen introduces situations of this kind repeatedly as a major device for revealing directly to the audience without exposition the complacent egotism of Helmer and the actuality of the retardation from proper maturity which Nora's character has received. The childlike quality of Nora's mind appears further in the facile imagination with which she builds the details of her story. The conclusion of her appeal is impulsive and sincere, revealing her warmheartedness and her secure assurance of Helmer's affection.

and she is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man, so as to perfect herself—

HEL. Very sensible, Mrs. Linde.

NORA. And when she heard you had been appointed manager of the Bank—the news was telegraphed, you know—she traveled here as quick as she could, Torvald, I am sure you will be able to do something for Christine, for my sake, won't you?⁽⁴⁹⁾

HEL. Well, it is not altogether impossible. I presume you are a widow, Mrs. Linde?

MRS. L. Yes.

HEL. And have had some experience of bookkeeping?

MRS. L. Yes, a fair amount.

HEL. Ah! well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you—

⁽⁵⁰⁾NORA [*clapping her hands*]. What did I tell you?

HEL. You have just come at a fortunate moment, Mrs. Linde.

MRS. L. How am I to thank you?

⁽⁵¹⁾HEL. There is no need. [*Puts on his coat.*] But today you must excuse me—

RANK. Wait a minute; I will come with you. [*Brings his fur coat from the hall and warms it at the fire.*]

NORA. Don't be long away, Torvald dear.

HEL. About an hour, not more.

NORA. Are you going too, Christine?

MRS. L. [*putting on her cloak*]. Yes, I must go and look for a room.

HEL. Oh, well then, we can walk down the street together.

NORA [*helping her*]. What a pity it is we are so short of space here; I am afraid it is impossible for us—

MRS. L. Please don't think of it! Good-bye, Nora dear, and many thanks.

NORA. Good-bye for the present. Of course you will come back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank. What do you say? If you are well enough? Oh, you must be! Wrap yourself up well. [*They go to the door all talking together. Children's voices are heard on the staircase.*]

(50) Nora is both warm-hearted and childishly proud of her husband's power and her influence over him.

(51) Clearing the stage for Nora to be alone with her children when Krogstad appears is covered by natural incidental conversation. Off-stage sound prepares for the entrance of the children and nurse.

NORA. There they are. There they are! [*She runs to open the door. The NURSE comes in with the children.*] Come in! Come in! [*Stoops and kisses them.*] Oh, you sweet blessings! Look at them, Christine! Aren't they darlings?

RANK. Don't let us stand here in the draught.

HEL. Come along, Mrs. Linde; the place will only be bearable for a mother now!⁽⁵¹⁾

[RANK, HELMER, and MRS. LINDE go downstairs. The NURSE comes forward with the children; NORA shuts the ball door.]

NORA. How fresh and well you look! Such red cheeks!—like apples and roses. [*The children all talk at once while she speaks to them.*] Have you had great fun? That's splendid! What, you pulled both Emmy and Bob along on the sledge? both at once? that *was* good. You are a clever boy, Ivar. Let me take her for a little, Anne. My sweet little baby doll! [*Takes the baby from the MAID and dances it up and down.*] Yes, yes, mother will dance with Bob too. What! Have you been snowballing? I wish I had been there too! ⁽⁵²⁾No, no, I will take their things off, Anne; please let me do it, it is such fun. Go in now, you look half frozen. There is some hot coffee for you on the stove.⁽⁵²⁾

[*The NURSE goes into the room on the left.* ⁽⁵³⁾NORA takes off the children's things and throws them about, while they all talk to her at once.]

NORA. Really! Did a big dog run after you? But it didn't bite you? No, dogs don't bite nice little dolly children. You mustn't look at the parcels, Ivar. What are they? Ah, I daresay you would like to know. No, no—it's something nasty! Come, let us have a game! What shall we play at? Hide and Seek? Yes, we'll play Hide and Seek. Bob shall hide first. Must I hide? Very well, I'll hide first. [*She and the children laugh and shout, and romp in and out of the room; at last NORA hides under the table, the children rush in and look for her, but do not see her; they hear her smothered laughter, run to the table, lift up the cloth and find her. Shouts of laughter. She crawls forward and pretends to frighten them. Fresh laughter.*

(52) Clearing the stage of the nurse.

(53) Nora's scene with the children is important to give force to her shock and emotions at the end of Act I. The scene also builds up a perfect dramatic contrast for the entrance of Krogstad, an even higher climax of Nora's joyousness and freedom from care than that preceding Krogstad's former entrance. There is dramatic irony in the audience's awareness of the knock, the opening door, Krogstad's appearance, and the interval while he looks on with Nora in complete unconsciousness of the ominous presence.

Meanwhile there has been a knock at the hall door, but none of them has noticed it. The door is half opened, and KROGSTAD appears. He waits a little; the game goes on.⁽⁵³⁾

KROG. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer.

⁽⁵⁴⁾NORA [*with a stifled cry, turns round and gets up onto her knees*]. Ah! what do you want?⁽⁵⁴⁾

⁽⁵⁵⁾KROG. Excuse me, the outer door was ajar; I suppose someone forgot to shut it.

NORA [*rising*]. My husband is out, Mr. Krogstad.

KROG. I know that.

NORA. What do you want here, then?

KROG. A word with you.⁽⁵⁵⁾

NORA. With me?—[*To the children, gently.*] Go in to nurse. What? No, the strange man won't do mother any harm. When he has gone we will have another game. [*She takes the children into the room on the left, and shuts the door after them.*] You want to speak to me?

KROG. Yes, I do.

NORA. Today? It is not the first of the month yet.

⁽⁵⁶⁾KROG. No, it is Christmas Eve, and it will depend on yourself what sort of a Christmas you will spend.

NORA. What do you want? Today it is absolutely impossible for me—

KROG. We won't talk about that till later on. This is something different. I presume you can give me a moment?⁽⁵⁶⁾

NORA. Yes—yes, I can—although—

⁽⁵⁷⁾KROG. Good. I was in Olsen's Restaurant and saw your husband going down the street—⁽⁵⁷⁾

NORA. Yes?

KROG. With a lady.

NORA. What then?

KROG. May I make so bold as to ask if it was a Mrs. Linde?

NORA. It was.

KROG. Just arrived in town?

NORA. Yes, today.

KROG. She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?

NORA. She is. But I don't see—

(54) Krogstad's entrance is the beginning of the rise to the attack. Nora's reaction makes the audience realize the importance of the complication and begins the intensive, sustained suspense of the play.

(55) Krogstad's entrance explained and made natural.

(56) Ominous, builds suspense.

(57) Further explains Krogstad's informal entrance.

KROG. I knew her too, once upon a time.

NORA. I am aware of that.

KROG. Are you? So you know all about it; I thought as much. Then I can ask you, without beating about the bush—is Mrs. Linde to have an appointment in the Bank?

NORA. What right have you to question me, Mr. Krogstad?—You, one of my husband's subordinates! But since you ask, you shall know. ⁽⁵⁸⁾Yes, Mrs. Linde *is* to have an appointment. And it was I who pleaded her cause, Mr. Krogstad, let me tell you that.

KROG. I was right in what I thought, then.

NORA [*walking up and down the stage*]. Sometimes one has a tiny little bit of influence, I should hope. Because one is a woman, it does not necessarily follow that—. When anyone is in a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, they should really be careful to avoid offending anyone who—who—

KROG. Who has influence?

NORA. Exactly. ⁽⁵⁸⁾

⁽⁵⁹⁾KROG. [*changing his tone*]. Mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf. ⁽⁵⁹⁾

NORA. What? What do you mean?

KROG. You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank.

NORA. What do you mean by that? Who proposes to take your post away from you?

KROG. Oh, there is no necessity to keep up the pretence of ignorance. I can quite understand that your friend is not very anxious to expose herself to the chance of rubbing shoulders with me; and I quite understand, too, whom I have to thank for being turned off.

NORA. But I assure you—

KROG. Very likely; but, to come to the point, the time has come when I should advise you to use your influence to prevent that.

NORA. But, Mr. Krogstad, I *have* no influence.

KROG. Haven't you? I thought you said yourself just now—

NORA. Naturally I did not mean you to put that con-

(58) Nora falls into a trap. Krogstad had shrewdly surmised the exercise of Nora's influence for the appointment of Mrs. Linde, and Nora, quite unsuspecting of what he is leading up to, plays into his hands by naïvely flaunting the fact.

(59) Krogstad springs the trap, a complication in the rise to the attack; he has goaded Nora into volunteering explicit confirmation of what he had suspected, and she is caught by her own words. The abruptness of Krogstad's revelation of his purpose constitutes a highly dramatic reversal in Nora's position, and the announcement of his purpose is a complication in the rise to the attack.

struction on it. I! What should make you think I have any influence of that kind with my husband?

⁽⁶⁰⁾KROG. Oh, I have known your husband from our student days. I don't suppose he is any more unassailable than other husbands.⁽⁶⁰⁾

NORA. If you speak slightly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house.

KROG. You are bold, Mrs. Helmer.

NORA. I am not afraid of you any longer. As soon as the New Year comes, I shall in a very short time be free of the whole thing.

⁽⁶¹⁾KROG. [*controlling himself*]. Listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. If necessary, I am prepared to fight for my small post in the Bank as if I were fighting for my life.⁽⁶¹⁾

NORA. So it seems.

⁽⁶²⁾KROG. It is not only for the sake of the money; indeed, that weighs least with me in the matter. There is another reason—well, I may as well tell you. My position is this. I daresay you know, like everybody else, that once, many years ago, I was guilty of an indiscretion.

NORA. I think I have heard something of the kind.

KROG. The matter never came into court; but every way seemed to be closed to me after that. So I took to the business that you know of. I had to do something; and, honestly, I don't think I've been one of the worst. But now I must cut myself free from all that. My sons are growing up; for their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town. This post in the Bank was like the first step up for me—and now your husband is going to kick me downstairs again into the mud.⁽⁶²⁾

⁽⁶³⁾NORA. But you must believe me, Mr. Krogstad; it is not in my power to help you at all.

KROG. Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have means to compel you.

NORA. You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

KROG. Hm!—suppose I were to tell him?⁽⁶³⁾

⁽⁶⁴⁾NORA. It would be perfectly infamous of you. [*Sobbing.*] To think of his learning my secret, which has been

(60) Antecedent material of Helmer's and Krogstad's former acquaintance, which becomes crucial later.

(61) Introduces the intensity of the force opposed to Nora.

(62) Krogstad, although a minor character, is thoroughly complex and interesting.

(63) Further complication in the rise to the attack. The revelation that Krogstad is the man from whom Nora borrowed the money has been completely prepared for by Nora's story to Mrs. Linde, her reaction at each entrance of Krogstad, and her reaction to learning that he was dependent upon Helmer for his position.

(64) The key to understanding of Nora's character and of the play is realization of her feeling for beauty of conduct, moral beauty, the center of which is love. She is completely innocent of any sense of crime or guilt in her forgery; her action had been for love, something of beauty and pride to communicate to Helmer in her own way and in her own time. Her reaction here is distress, not fear.

my joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way—that he should learn it from you! And it would put me in a horribly disagreeable position—⁽⁶⁴⁾

⁽⁶⁵⁾KROG. Only disagreeable?

NORA [*impetuously*]. Well, do it then!—and it will be the worse for you. My husband will see for himself what a blackguard you are, and you certainly won't keep your post then.

KROG. I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home that you were afraid of?

NORA. If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing, and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

KROG. [*coming a step nearer*]. Listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. Either you have a very bad memory or you know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details.

NORA. What do you mean?

KROG. When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.

NORA. I didn't know anyone else to go to.

KROG. I promised to get you that amount—

NORA. Yes, and you did so.

KROG. I promised to get you that amount, on certain conditions. Your mind was so taken up with your husband's illness, and you were so anxious to get the money for your journey, that you seem to have paid no attention to the conditions of our bargain. Therefore it will not be amiss if I remind you of them. Now, I promised to get the money on the security of a bond which I drew up.

NORA. Yes, and which I signed.

KROG. Good. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for the money; those lines your father should have signed.

NORA. Should? He did sign them.

KROG. I had left the date blank; that is to say your father should himself have inserted the date on which he signed the paper. Do you remember that?

NORA. Yes, I think I remember—

(65) The beginning of the process of revealing the antecedent fact of the forgery, all of which is brought in not as separate exposition, but with every detail as a complication in an intense conflict culminating in the attack of the play.

KROG. Then I gave you the bond to send by post to your father. Is that not so?

NORA. Yes.

KROG. And you naturally did so at once, because five or six days afterwards you brought me the bond with your father's signature. And then I gave you the money.

NORA. Well, haven't I been paying it off regularly?

KROG. Fairly so, yes. But—to come back to the matter in hand—that must have been a very trying time for you, Mrs. Helmer?

NORA. It was, indeed.

KROG. Your father was very ill, wasn't he?

NORA. He was very near his end.

KROG. And died soon afterwards?

NORA. Yes.

KROG. Tell me, Mrs. Helmer, can you by any chance remember what day your father died?—on what day of the month, I mean.

NORA. Papa died on the 29th of September.

KROG. That is correct; I have ascertained it for myself. And, as that is so, there is a discrepancy [*taking a paper from his pocket*] which I cannot account for.

NORA. What discrepancy? I don't know—

KROG. The discrepancy consists, Mrs. Helmer, in the fact that your father signed this bond three days after his death.

NORA. What do you mean? I don't understand—

KROG. Your father died on the 29th of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the 2nd of October. It is a discrepancy, isn't it? [*NORA is silent.*] Can you explain it to me? [*NORA is still silent.*] It is a remarkable thing, too, that the words "2nd of October," as well as the year, are not written in your father's handwriting but in one that I think I know. Well, of course it can be explained; your father may have forgotten to date his signature, and someone else may have dated it haphazard before they knew of his death. There is no harm in that. It all depends on the signature of the name; and *that* is genuine, I suppose, Mrs. Helmer? It was your father himself who signed his name here?

⁽⁶⁶⁾NORA [*after a short pause, throws her head up and looks*

(66) Climax of one phase of the conflict, in which Krogstad inexorably pursues his way to the establishment of the forgery. From here, the conflict is between the two points of view, the legal and Nora's equally inexorable logic of love.

defiantly at him]. No, it was not. It was I that wrote papa's name.⁽⁶⁸⁾

KROG. Are you aware that is a dangerous confession?

NORA. In what way? You shall have your money soon.

KROG. Let me ask you a question; why did you not send the paper to your father?

⁽⁶⁷⁾NORA. It was impossible; papa was so ill. If I had asked him for his signature, I should have had to tell him what the money was to be used for; and when he was so ill himself I couldn't tell him that my husband's life was in danger—it was impossible.

KROG. It would have been better for you if you had given up your trip abroad.

NORA. No, that was impossible. That trip was to save my husband's life; I couldn't give that up.⁽⁶⁷⁾

KROG. But did it never occur to you that you were committing a fraud on me?

⁽⁶⁸⁾NORA. I couldn't take that into account; I didn't trouble myself about you at all. I couldn't bear you, because you put so many heartless difficulties in my way, although you knew what a dangerous condition my husband was in.⁽⁶⁸⁾

KROG. Mrs. Helmer, you evidently do not realise clearly what it is that you have been guilty of. But I can assure you that my one false step, which lost me all my reputation, was nothing more or nothing worse than what you have done.

NORA. You? Do you ask me to believe that you were brave enough to run a risk to save your wife's life.

KROG. The law cares nothing about motives.

⁽⁶⁹⁾NORA. Then it must be a very foolish law.

KROG. Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

NORA. I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws—you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.⁽⁶⁹⁾

(67) Nora's logic.

(68) The unadmirable aspect of the woman's point of view as presented in the play, the limitation of feeling to the immediate concrete object of affection.

(69) The triumphant finality to her own mind of Nora's logic—a fine effort for a woman's last word, but met by as absolute finality from the other side.

KROG. Maybe. But matters of business—such business as you and I have had together—do you think I don't understand that? Very well. Do as you please. ⁽⁷⁰⁾But let me tell you this—if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me. [*He bows and goes out through the hall*]. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

NORA [*appears buried in thought for a short time, then tosses her head*]. Nonsense! Trying to frighten me like that!—I am not so silly as he thinks. [*Begins to busy herself putting the children's things in order.*] And yet—? No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake.

THE CHILDREN [*in the doorway on the left*]. Mother, the stranger man has gone out through the gate.

NORA. Yes, dears, I know. But don't tell anyone about the stranger man. Do you hear? Not even papa.

CHILDREN. No, mother; but will you come and play again?

NORA. No, no—not now.

CHILDREN. But, mother, you promised us.

NORA. Yes, but I can't now. Run away in; I have such a lot to do. Run away in, my sweet little darlings. [*She gets them into the room by degrees and shuts the door on them; then sits down on the sofa, takes up a piece of needle-work and sews a few stitches, but soon stops.*] No! [*Throws down the work, gets up, goes to the hall door and calls out.*] Helen! bring the Tree in. [*Goes to the table on the left, opens a drawer, and stops again.*] No, no! it is quite impossible!

MAID [*coming in with the Tree*]. Where shall I put it, ma'am?

NORA. Here, in the middle of the floor.

MAID. Shall I get you anything else?

NORA. No, thank you. I have all I want.

[*Exit MAID*]

NORA [*begins dressing the tree*]. A candle here—and flowers here—. The horrible man! It's all nonsense—there's nothing wrong. The Tree shall be splendid! I will do everything I can think of to please you, Torvald!—I will

(70) *The attack of the play.* The play opens upon a situation of potential drama: Nora's fate is delicately poised, in a state of unstable equilibrium. Let us look at the situation in three ways. First, in simplest terms, on the one hand is Nora's happy home, in which her life is centered; on the other, the forgery, revelation of which would destroy her home. Impending revelation forces Nora to fight for preservation of her home, and potential drama becomes actual: we have the attack of a play. The forgery in itself is material for the simplest sort of drama, perhaps melodrama.

Consider next how Ibsen complicates the situation. First, the knowledge and proof of the forgery is possessed not by a man who would merely feel a responsibility to report a violation of law to the proper authorities, but by a man whose own life is in a state of unstable equilibrium, and who sees in the knowledge of the forgery a potential instrument by which to resolve his own fate. He has possessed the knowledge for years; by a skilfully contrived set of converging circumstances Ibsen brings the situation to a focus. Helmer comes into a position of authority in the bank in which Krogstad holds a subordinate position. Mrs. Linde appears on the scene needing a position in the bank. Helmer (for a reason introduced later in the play) wants to get rid of Krogstad, and uses Mrs. Linde as an excuse to discharge him. Krogstad's own drama is precipitated by this situation, and the first move in his conflict precipitates Nora's conflict. The drama could still be a superficial drama of action; Ibsen makes it a drama of character relation and development. In the opening situation, independently of the forgery, Nora's life is poised for drama. Her happy relation to her husband depends upon an illusion as to his character and the degree of his love for her. The balance of her life in relation to the forgery is disturbed at the attack; the action which follows leads at the crisis of the play to destruction of her illusion concerning Helmer.

From a third point of view, consider how Ibsen brings the situation before the audience. He gains emotional identification of the audience with Nora by revealing the situation

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sing for you, dance for you— [HELMER *comes in with some papers under his arm.*] Oh, are you back already?

HEL. Yes. Has anyone been here?

NORA. Here? No.

HEL. That is strange. I saw Krogstad going out of the gate.

NORA. Did you? Oh, yes, I forgot, Krogstad was here for a moment.

HEL. Nora, I can see from your manner that he has been here begging you to say a good word for him.

NORA. Yes.

HEL. And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here; didn't he beg that of you too?

NORA. Yes, Torvald, but—

HEL. Nora, Nora, and you would be a party to that sort of thing? To have any talk with a man like that, and give him any sort of promise? And to tell me a lie into the bargain?

NORA. A lie—?

⁽⁷¹⁾HEL. Didn't you tell me no one had been here? [*Shakes his finger at her.*] My little song-bird must never do that again. A song-bird must have a clean beak to chirp with—no false notes! [*Puts his arm around her waist.*] That is so, isn't it? Yes, I am sure it is. [*Let's her go.*] We will say no more about it.⁽⁷¹⁾ [*Sits down by the stove.*] ⁽⁷²⁾How warm and snug it is here! [*Turns over his papers.*]⁽⁷²⁾

NORA [*after a short pause, during which she busies herself with the Christmas Tree*]. Torvald!

HEL. Yes.

⁽⁷³⁾NORA. I am looking forward tremendously to the fancy dress ball at the Stenborgs' the day after tomorrow.

HEL. And I am tremendously curious to see what you are going to surprise me with.

NORA. It was very silly of me to want to do that.

HEL. What do you mean?

NORA. I can't hit upon anything that will do; everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant.

HEL. Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?

to the audience as it is revealed to Nora, and following her consciousness throughout. By this method he also achieves elements of irony, contrast, and shock in the introductory part of the play to the attack. The play opens on Nora's joyousness and freedom from care due to Helmer's appointment, which prepares contrast for the descent of the blow. Then comes the intermediate stage of revelation of Nora's awareness of a degree of unstable equilibrium in the harmony and beauty of her relation to Helmer, and recognition of disturbance if Krogstad reveals that she had saved Helmer's life by borrowing. Then the shock of the forgery, and the irony of Nora's innocence through the years of the degree of danger in which she had placed herself and Helmer, and of Krogstad's having possessed the dangerous knowledge through those years. The final irony and shock is reserved for the crisis of the play, when Nora learns how much more fundamentally unstable her relation to Helmer was than she had suspected.

(71) Like a father bringing up a child.

(72) Dramatic irony, in the light of what is impending from the preceding scene with Krogstad.

(73) Helmer's seeing Krogstad leaving and his recognition of the purpose of his call on Nora was the first complication of the rising action, resolved by Helmer's rebuke of Nora and dismissal of the subject. Under that initial disadvantage, Nora begins the first move of her counterattack, the second complication of the rising action. She prepares an appeal to Helmer's vanity to put him in a favorable mood for her request that he reinstate Krogstad. Before her move can be completed, it is met by a new and serious complication from Helmer, his opinions of the intangible influence on children of the presence in the home of a deceitful mother and his expression of utter aversion to anyone guilty of deceit. The expression of such an opinion from Helmer is appalling to Nora because, while recognizing his little weakness of vanity, she has implicit faith in his wisdom and opinions in the main. In her first attempt to escape the attack from Krogstad, Nora is confronted by attack, un-

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NORA [*standing behind his chair with her arms on the back of it*]. Are you very busy, Torvald?

HEL. Well—

NORA. What are all those papers?

HEL. Bank business.

NORA. Already?

HEL. I have got authority from the retiring manager to undertake the necessary changes in the staff and in the re-arrangement of the work; and I must make use of the Christmas week for that, so as to have everything in order for the new year.

NORA. Then that was why this poor Krogstad—

HEL. Hm!

NORA [*leans against the back of his chair and strokes his hair*]. If you hadn't been so busy I should have asked you a tremendously big favor, Torvald.

HEL. What is that? Tell me.

NORA. There is no one has such good taste as you. And I do so want to look nice at the fancy-dress ball. Torvald, couldn't you take me in hand and decide what I shall go as, and what sort of a dress I shall wear?

HEL. Aha! so my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue?

NORA. Yes, Torvald, I can't get along a bit without your help.

HEL. Very well, I will think it over, we shall manage to hit upon something.

NORA. That is nice of you. [*Goes to the Christmas Tree. A short pause.*] How pretty the red flowers look—. But, tell me, was it really something very bad that this Krogstad was guilty of?⁽⁷³⁾

⁽⁷⁴⁾HEL. He forged someone's name. Have you any idea what that means?

NORA. Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity?

HEL. Yes; or, as in so many cases, by imprudence. I am not so heartless as to condemn a man altogether because of a single false step of that kind.

NORA. No, you wouldn't, would you, Torvald?

conscious on his part, from Helmer, and finds herself in a dilemma. If Krogstad reveals the forgery to Helmer, serious consequences for her home will follow; if the danger from Krogstad is averted, she will be continuing in deceit and will be an unfit companion for her children.

The introduction of the fancy dress ball "the day after tomorrow," and the choice of a dress, prepare for the episodes of the dress and the Tarantella in Act II and of the ball in Act III, and establish the time intervals.

(74) Like Krogstad's pursuit of the fact of forgery, a second inexorable attack presses down upon Nora. Step by step, unconsciously on his part, but to Nora's own mind, Helmer identifies her in character with Krogstad.

HEL. Many a man has been able to retrieve his character, if he has openly confessed his fault and taken his punishment.

NORA. Punishment—?

HEL. But Krogstad did nothing of that sort; he got himself out of it by a cunning trick, and that is why he has gone under altogether.

NORA. But do you think it would—?

HEL. Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with everyone, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own wife and children. And about the children—that is the most terrible part of it all, Nora.

NORA. How?

HEL. Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil.⁽⁷⁴⁾

NORA [*coming nearer him*]. Are you sure of that?

HEL. My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

NORA. Why do you only say—mother?

HEL. It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Every lawyer is familiar with the fact. This Krogstad, now, has been persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation; that is why I say he has lost all moral character. [*Holds out his hands to her.*] That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. Come, come, what is this? Give me your hand. There now, that's settled.⁽⁷⁶⁾ I assure you it would be quite impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel physically ill when I am in the company of such people.⁽⁷⁶⁾

NORA [*takes her hand out of his and goes to the opposite side of the Christmas Tree*]. How hot it is in here; and I have such a lot to do.

HEL. [*getting up and putting his papers in order*]. Yes, and I must try and read through some of these before dinner; and I must think about your costume, too. And it is

(75) Helmer's speeches function dramatically and are self-characterizing at the same time. The shift from Krogstad as an example to mothers as a generalization is so illogical as clearly to reveal a strong masculine egocentricity in Helmer.

(76) Preparation for the full revelation later of why Krogstad's presence in the bank would make Helmer uncomfortable.

just possible I may have something ready in gold paper to hang up on the Tree. ⁽⁷⁷⁾[*Puts his hand on her head.*] My precious little singing-bird! ⁽⁷⁷⁾[*He goes in to his room and shuts the door after him.*]

NORA [*after a pause, whispers*]. No, no—it isn't true. It's impossible; it must be impossible.

[*The NURSE opens the door on the left.*]

NURSE. The little ones are begging so hard to be allowed to come in to mamma.

⁽⁷⁸⁾NORA. No, no, no! Don't let them come in to me! You stay with them, Anne.

NURSE. Very well, ma'am. [*Shuts the door.*]

NORA [*pale with terror*]. Deprave my little children? Poison my home? [*A short pause. Then she tosses her head.*] It's not true. It can't possibly be true. ⁽⁷⁸⁾

ACT II

⁽¹⁾THE SAME SCENE.—*The Christmas Tree is in the corner by the piano, stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle-ends on its dishevelled branches. NORA's cloak and hat are lying on the sofa. She is alone in the room, walking about uneasily. She stops by the sofa and takes up her cloak.*

NORA [*drops the cloak*]. Someone is coming now! [*Goes to the door and listens.*] No—it is no one. Of course, no one will come today, Christmas Day—nor tomorrow either. But, perhaps—[*opens the door and looks out*]. No, nothing in the letter-box; it is quite empty. [*Comes forward.*] What rubbish! of course he can't be in earnest about it. Such a thing couldn't happen; it is impossible—I have three little children. ⁽¹⁾

[*Enter the NURSE from the room on the left, carrying a big cardboard box.*]

NURSE. At last I have found the box with the fancy dress.

NORA. Thanks; put it on the table.

NURSE [*in doing so*]. But it is very much in want of mending.

(77) Irony of Helmer's complete unconsciousness of the drama going on under his nose.

(78) A good first-act curtain, with a major advance beyond the attack. It is Nora's reaction which reveals to the audience the full significance of what Helmer has said, and the dilemma she is in.

In the first act, all of the characters have been introduced, and the audience made well acquainted with the two principals and their relation to each other. Exposition of the antecedent material and immediate situation necessary for the attack has been accomplished, with some details of antecedent material preparatory to later action, as Mrs. Linde's former acquaintance with Krogstad, and school acquaintance between Krogstad and Helmer. The conflict has been precipitated, and intensified in a dilemma for the curtain. Sympathetic identification with the principal character has been established, with the character involved in a conflict of broad appeal, a woman's fight for the welfare and happiness of her husband and home.

ACT II

(1) The appearance of the Christmas tree marks the passage of time from the day before Christmas to Christmas Day. Nora's opening business and soliloquy reestablish the tension of the first-act curtain. Nora's several soliloquies do not represent the convention of substituting audible speech for silent thought as a device to acquaint the audience with the thoughts of a character, but are meant to be understood as Nora "talking to herself." Such speech is consistent with Nora's character and appears as a habit from the opening of the play, but it is a device to be used with extreme caution if at all in a play in the realistic convention.

NORA. I should like to tear it into a hundred thousand pieces.

NURSE. What an idea! It can easily be put in order—just a little patience.

NORA. Yes, I will go and get Mrs. Linde to come and help me with it.

NURSE. What, out again? In this horrible weather? You will catch cold, ma'am, and make yourself ill.

⁽²⁾NORA. Well, worse than that might happen. How are the children?

NURSE. The poor little souls are playing with their Christmas presents, but—

NORA. Do they ask much for me?

NURSE. You see, they are so accustomed to have their mamma with them.

NORA. Yes, but, nurse, I shall not be able to be so much with them now as I was before.⁽²⁾

⁽³⁾NURSE. Oh, well, young children easily get accustomed to anything.

NORA. Do you think so? Do you think they would forget their mother if she went away altogether?

NURSE. Good heavens!—went away altogether?

NORA. Nurse, I want you to tell me something I have often wondered about—how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

NURSE. I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

NORA. Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

NURSE. What, when I was going to get such a good place by it? A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me.

NORA. But I suppose your daughter has quite forgotten you.

NURSE. No, indeed she hasn't. She wrote to me when she was confirmed, and when she was married.

NORA [*putting her arms round her neck*]. Dear old Anne, you were a good mother to me when I was little.

(2) Nora's first action in response to the curtain complication of Act I is revealed.

(3) Preparation for direct introduction later of Nora's thought either of leaving her home, or of suicide.

NURSE. Little Nora, poor dear, had no other mother but me.

NORA. And if my little ones had no other mother, I am sure you would— What nonsense I am talking!⁽³⁾ [*Opens the box.*] Go in to them. Now I must—. You will see tomorrow how charming I shall look.

NURSE. I am sure there will be no one at the ball so charming as you, ma'am. [*Goes into the room on the left.*]

NORA [*begins to unpack the box, but soon pushes it away from her*]. If only I dared go out. If only no one would come. If only I could be sure nothing would happen here in the meantime. Stuff and nonsense! No one will come. Only I mustn't think about it. I will brush my muff. What lovely, lovely gloves! Out of my thoughts, out of my thoughts! ⁽⁴⁾One, two, three, four, five, six— [*Screams.*] Ah! there is someone coming—. [*Makes a movement towards the door, but stands irresolute.*]

[*Enter MRS. LINDE from the hall, where she has taken off her cloak and hat.*]

NORA. Oh, it's you, Christine. There is no one else out there, is there? How good of you to come!⁽⁴⁾

⁽⁵⁾MRS. L. I heard you were up asking for me.

NORA. Yes, I was passing by. As a matter of fact, it is something you could help me with.⁽⁵⁾ Let us sit down here on the sofa. Look here. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs', who live above us; and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl, and dance the Tarantella that I learnt at Capri.

MRS. L. I see; you are going to keep up the character.

NORA. Yes, Torvald wants me to. Look, here is the dress; Torvald had it made for me there, but now it is all so torn, and I haven't any idea—

MRS. L. We will easily put that right. It is only some of the trimming come unsewn here and there. Needle and thread? Now then, that's all we want.

MRS. L. [*sewing*]. So you are going to be dressed up tomorrow, Nora. I will tell you what—I shall come in for a moment and see you in your fine feathers. But I have

(4) The false alarm reveals Nora's tension, and builds tension for the audience. It is extremely important for the audience to be given full identification with the extreme strain which Nora has lived through in the period between acts. The interval is only a day, but what that day has done to the carefree Nora is especially enforced by the uncontrollable physical reaction of her scream. The effect is accented by the contrasting relief when Mrs. Linde enters, and by the pleasant domesticity of the occasion for which Nora wanted Mrs. Linde to come.

(5) Mrs. Linde's entrance is explained and made natural.

completely forgotten to thank you for a delightful evening yesterday.

NORA [*gets up, and crosses the stage*]. Well, I don't think yesterday was as pleasant as usual. You ought to have come down to town a little earlier, Christine. Certainly Torvald does understand how to make a house dainty and attractive.

MRS. L. And so do you, it seems to me; you are not your father's daughter for nothing. But tell me, is Doctor Rank always as depressed as he was yesterday?

⁽⁶⁾NORA. No; yesterday it was very noticeable. I must tell you that he suffers from a very dangerous disease. He has consumption of the spine, poor creature. His father was a horrible man who committed all sorts of excesses; and that is why his son was sickly from childhood, do you understand? ⁽⁶⁾

MRS. L. [*dropping her sewing*]. But, my dearest Nora, how do you know anything about such things?

NORA [*walking about*]. Pooh! When you have three children, you get visits now and then from—from married women, who know something of medical matters, and they talk about one thing and another.

MRS. L. [*goes on sewing. A short silence*]. Does Doctor Rank come here every day?

NORA. Every day regularly. He is Torvald's most intimate friend, and a friend of mine too. He is just like one of the family.

⁽⁷⁾MRS. L. But tell me this—is he perfectly sincere? I mean, isn't he the kind of man that is very anxious to make himself agreeable?

NORA. Not in the least. What makes you think that?

MRS. L. When you introduced him to me yesterday, he declared he had often heard my name mentioned in this house; but afterwards I noticed that your husband hadn't the slightest idea who I was. So how could Doctor Rank—? ⁽⁷⁾

NORA. That is quite right, Christine. Torvald is so absurdly fond of me that he wants me absolutely to himself, as he says. At first he used to seem almost jealous if I mentioned any of the dear folks at home, so naturally I

(6) Transmitted disease, like heredity, interested Ibsen as a form of fate, and was made the central theme of a later drama, *Ghosts*.

(7) A natural device for bringing in exposition of Nora's respective relations to Helmer and to Dr. Rank. The incident referred to was, of course, "planted" in the first act for this device, at the same time that it helped at the time to make the audience acquainted with the characters.

gave up doing so. But I often talk about such things with Doctor Rank, because he likes hearing about them.

⁽⁸⁾MRS. L. Listen to me, Nora. You are still very like a child in many things, and I am older than you in many ways and have a little more experience. Let me tell you this—you ought to make an end of it with Doctor Rank.

NORA. What ought I to make an end of?

MRS. L. Of two things, I think. Yesterday you talked some nonsense about a rich admirer who was to leave you money—

NORA. An admirer who doesn't exist, unfortunately! But what then?

MRS. L. Is Doctor Rank a man of means?

NORA. Yes, he is.

MRS. L. And has no one to provide for?

NORA. No, no one; but—

MRS. L. And comes here every day?

NORA. Yes, I told you so.

MRS. L. But how can this well-bred man be so tactless?

NORA. I don't understand you at all.

MRS. L. Don't prevaricate, Nora. Do you suppose I don't guess who lent you the two hundred and fifty pounds?

NORA. Are you out of your senses? How can you think of such a thing! A friend of ours, who comes here every day! Do you realise what a horribly painful position that would be?

MRS. L. Then it really isn't he?

NORA. No, certainly not. It would never have entered into my head for a moment. Besides, he had no money to lend then; he came into his money afterwards.

MRS. L. Well, I think that was lucky for you, my dear Nora.

NORA. No, it would never have come into my head to ask Doctor Rank. Although I am quite sure that if I had asked him—

MRS. L. But of course you won't.

NORA. Of course not. I have no reason to think it could possibly be necessary. But I am quite sure that if I told Doctor Rank—

(8) The conversation with Mrs. Linde not only prepares the audience for Nora's decision to appeal to Dr. Rank for aid to solve her problem, but shows the psychological preparation of Nora's own mind.

MRS. L. Behind your husband's back?

NORA. I must make an end of it with the other one, and that will be behind his back too. I *must* make an end of it with him.

MRS. L. Yes, that is what I told you yesterday, but—

NORA [*walking up and down*]. A man can put a thing like that straight much easier than a woman—

MRS. L. One's husband, yes.

NORA. Nonsense! [*Standing still.*] When you pay off a debt you get your bond back, don't you?

MRS. L. Yes, as a matter of course.

NORA. And can tear it into a hundred thousand pieces, and burn it up—the nasty dirty paper!⁽⁸⁾

⁽⁹⁾MRS. L. [*looks hard at her, lays down her sewing and gets up slowly*]. Nora, you are concealing something from me.

NORA. Do I look as if I were?

MRS. L. Something has happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?⁽⁹⁾

NORA [*going nearer to her*]. Christine! [*Listens.*] Hush! there's Torvald come home. ⁽¹⁰⁾Do you mind going in to the children for the present? Torvald can't bear to see dressmaking going on. Let Anne help you.⁽¹⁰⁾

MRS. L. [*gathering some of the things together*]. Certainly—but I am not going away from here till we have had it out with one another. [*She goes into the room on the left, as HELMER comes in from the hall.*]

⁽¹¹⁾NORA [*going up to HELMER*]. I have wanted you so much, Torvald dear.

HELMER. Was that the dressmaker?

NORA. No, it was Christine; she is helping me to put my dress in order. You will see I shall look quite smart.

HELMER. Wasn't that a happy thought of mine, now?

NORA. Splendid! But don't you think it is nice of me, too, to do as you wish?

HELMER. Nice?—because you do as your husband wishes? Well, well, you little rogue, I am sure you did not mean it in that way. But I am not going to disturb you; you will want to be trying on your dress, I expect.

NORA. I suppose you are going to work.

(9) Preparation for Mrs. Linde's decision that things should be allowed to take their course and concealment be ended in this household.

(10) Clears the stage of Mrs. Linde for scene between Nora and Helmer.

(11) Act II, rising action, is built upon three efforts by Nora to find a way out, each a more difficult way than the preceding. Here, her first effort begins, the simplest if it works, direct action on Helmer to keep Krogstad in the bank. Nora leads up to the subject with her established feminine methods. There is pathos in dependence on her squirrel and skylark appeal in a situation so serious to herself.

HEL. Yes. [*Shows her a bundle of papers.*] Look at that. I have just been into the bank. [*Turns to go into his room.*]

NORA. Torvald.

HEL. Yes.

NORA. If your little squirrel were to ask you for something very, very prettily—?

HEL. What then?

NORA. Would you do it?

HEL. I should like to hear what it is, first.

NORA. Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants.

HEL. Speak plainly.

NORA. Your skylark would chirp, chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling—

HEL. Well, my skylark does that anyhow.

NORA. I would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

HEL. Nora—you surely don't mean that request you made of me this morning?

NORA [*going near him*]. Yes, Torvald, I beg you so earnestly—⁽¹¹⁾

HEL. Have you really the courage to open up that question again?

NORA. Yes, dear, you *must* do as I ask; you *must* let Krogstad keep his post in the bank.

⁽¹²⁾HEL. My dear Nora, it is his post that I have arranged Mrs. Linde shall have.⁽¹²⁾

NORA. Yes, you have been awfully kind about that; but you could just as well dismiss some other clerk instead of Krogstad.

HEL. This is simply incredible obstinacy! Because you chose to give him a thoughtless promise that you would speak for him, I am expected to—

NORA. That isn't the reason, Torvald. It is for your own sake. This fellow writes in the most scurrilous newspapers; you have told me so yourself. He can do you an unspeakable amount of harm. I am frightened to death of him—

(12) A fresh complication. This point has been carefully prepared for: Helmer could be so sure of finding a place for Mrs. Linde on Nora's request because he had already dismissed Krogstad, as we learn later, on the ground that Krogstad's presence in the bank made him uncomfortable. A few minutes after Mrs. Linde left the Helmer home, Krogstad entered there, already dismissed and attributing his dismissal wrongly to Mrs. Linde. We now learn that Helmer took advantage of the vacancy of Krogstad's post to place Mrs. Linde. This fact operates as a minor complication strengthening Helmer's position in the conflict with Nora, and makes Nora appear more unreasonably obstinate. The preparation for this minor complication is an example of Ibsen's meticulous care for consistency and clarity of detail.

HEL. Ah, I understand; it is recollections of the past that scare you.

NORA. What do you mean?

HEL. Naturally you are thinking of your father.

NORA. Yes—yes, of course. Just recall to your mind what these malicious creatures wrote in the papers about papa, and how horribly they slandered him. I believe they would have procured his dismissal if the Department had not sent you over to inquire into it, and if you had not been so kindly disposed and helpful to him.

⁽¹³⁾HEL. My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me. Your father's reputation as a public official was not above suspicion. Mine is, and I hope it will continue to be so, as long as I hold my office.⁽¹³⁾

NORA. You never can tell what mischief these men may contrive. We ought to be so well off, so snug and happy here in our peaceful home, and have no cares—you and I and the children, Torvald! That is why I beg you so earnestly—

HEL. And it is just by interceding for him that you make it impossible for me to keep him. It is already known at the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding—

NORA. And what if it did?

HEL. Of course!—if only this obstinate little person can get her way! Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence? I should very soon feel the consequences of it I can tell you! And besides, there is one thing that makes it quite impossible for me to have Krogstad in the bank as long as I am manager.

NORA. Whatever is that?

HEL. His moral failings I might perhaps have overlooked, if necessary—

NORA. Yes, you could—couldn't you?

⁽¹⁴⁾HEL. And I hear he is a good worker, too. But I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in after life. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms

(13) Antecedent material which prepares for Helmer's reference to Nora's inheritance of character from her father at the crisis.

(14) Under pressure, the real reason for Helmer's dismissal of Krogstad comes out. This speech is a particularly good example of the integration of exposition with drama. The piece of antecedent information comes out under emotion, it is a move in the conflict between Nora and Helmer and precipitates what follows. The fundamental weakness of Helmer's character begins to be exposed.

with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the bank intolerable.⁽¹⁴⁾

NORA. Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

HEL. Don't you? Why not?

NORA. Because it is such a narrow-minded way of looking at things.

HEL. What are you saying? Narrow-minded? Do you think I am narrow-minded?

NORA. No, just the opposite, dear—and it is exactly for that reason.

HEL. It's the same thing. You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must be so too. Narrow-minded! Very well—I must put an end to this. [*Goes to the hall-door and calls.*] Helen!

NORA. What are you going to do?

⁽¹⁵⁾HEL. [*looking among his papers*]. Settle it. [*Enter MAID.*] Look here; take this letter and go downstairs with it at once. Find a messenger and tell him to deliver it, and be quick. The address is on it, and here is the money.

MAID. Very well, sir. [*Exit with the letter.*]

HEL. [*putting his papers together*]. Now then, little Miss Obstinate.

NORA [*breathlessly*]. Torvald—what was that letter?

HEL. Krogstad's dismissal.

NORA. Call her back, Torvald! There is still time. Oh, Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake—for your own sake—for the children's sake! Do you hear me, Torvald? Call her back! You don't know what that letter can bring upon us.

HEL. It's too late.

NORA. Yes, it's too late.⁽¹⁶⁾

HEL. My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. It is, indeed. Isn't it an insult to think that I should be afraid of a starving quill-driver's vengeance? But I forgive you nevertheless,

(15) The climax of the episode and defeat of Nora's first effort. The crisis is well-built for dramatic effect and emphasis. It is introduced abruptly with Helmer's terse answer, "Settle it." Then follows a winding-up of tension in Helmer's directions to the maid and the stage business of dispatching the letter while Nora looks on in stunned silence. The tension is released with the abruptness again of Helmer's answer, "Krogstad's dismissal"; is given expression in Nora's despairing outburst; and subsides into the laconic finality of "too late."

because it is such eloquent witness to your great love for me. [*Takes her in his arms.*] And that is as it should be, my own darling Nora. ⁽¹⁶⁾Come what will, you may be sure I shall have both courage and strength if they be needed. You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself. ⁽¹⁶⁾

NORA [*in a horror-stricken voice*]. What do you mean by that?

HEL. Everything, I say—

NORA [*recovering herself*]. You will never have to do that.

HEL. That's right. Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should. That is how it shall be. [*Caressing her.*] Are you content now? There! there!—not these frightened dove's eyes! The whole thing is only the wildest fancy!—Now, you must go and play through the Tarantella and practise with your tambourine. ⁽¹⁷⁾I shall go into the inner office and shut the door, and I shall hear nothing; you can make as much noise as you please. [*Turns back at the door.*] And when Rank comes, tell him where he will find me. [*Nods to her, takes his papers and goes into his room, and shuts the door after him.*] ⁽¹⁷⁾

⁽¹⁸⁾NORA [*bewildered with anxiety, stands as if rooted to the spot, and whispers*]. He was capable of doing it. He will do it. He will do it in spite of everything.—No, not that! Never, never! Anything rather than that! Oh, for some help, some way out of it! [*The door-bell rings.*] Doctor Rank! Anything rather than that—anything, whatever it is! ⁽¹⁸⁾ [*She puts her hands over her face, pulls herself together, goes to the door and opens it. RANK is standing without, hanging up his coat. During the following dialogue it begins to grow dark.*]

NORA. Good-day, Doctor Rank. I knew your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald now; I think he is busy with something.

RANK. And you?

NORA [*brings him in and shuts the door after him*]. Oh, you know very well I always have time for you.

RANK. Thank you. I shall make use of as much of it as I can.

(16) Irony, in retrospect after the crisis. Nora has implicit confidence in Helmer's love, courage, and strength; his statement immediately suggests to her mind that if the forgery is revealed, he will attempt to shield her by taking the crime upon himself. Such a manifestation of Helmer's love is the wonderful thing she comes to anticipate, but to prevent which, out of her own love, she is driven to the desperate intention of suicide.

(17) Clears the stage for the scene between Nora and Dr. Rank, and prepares for Dr. Rank's entrance, and the intimacy and security from interruption of their conversation. Helmer's exit was prepared for at his entrance by the bundle of papers and announcement that he was going to work.

(18) Dr. Rank enters just when Nora's mind is in the highest state of preparation for seeking aid from him.

NORA. What do you mean by that? As much of it as you can?

RANK. Well, does that alarm you?

NORA. It was such a strange way of putting it. Is anything likely to happen?

RANK. Nothing but what I have long been prepared for. But I certainly didn't expect it to happen so soon.

NORA [*gripping him by the arm*]. What have you found out? Doctor Rank, you must tell me.

RANK [*sitting down by the stove*]. It is all up with me. And it can't be helped.

NORA [*with a sigh of relief*]. Is it about yourself?

⁽¹⁹⁾RANK. Who else? It is no use lying to one's self. I am the most wretched of all my patients, Mrs. Helmer. Lately I have been taking stock of my internal economy. Bankrupt! Probably within a month I shall lie rotting in the churchyard.

NORA. What an ugly thing to say!

RANK. The thing itself is cursedly ugly, and the worst of it is that I shall have to face so much more that is ugly before that. I shall only make one more examination of myself; when I have done that, I shall know pretty certainly when it will be that the horrors of dissolution will begin. There is something I want to tell you. Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything that is ugly; I won't have him in my sick-room.

NORA. Oh, but, Doctor Rank—

RANK. I won't have him there. Not on any account. I bar my door to him. As soon as I am quite certain that the worst has come, I shall send you my card with a black cross on it, and then you will know that the loathsome end has begun.⁽¹⁹⁾

NORA. You are quite absurd today. And I wanted you so much to be in a really good humor.

⁽²⁰⁾RANK. With death stalking beside me?—To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin! Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted—⁽²⁰⁾

(19) In the last act, when the minor characters have served their functions, Ibsen not only clears the stage, but clears the play of them, eliminates them from further immediate contact with Nora or Helmer, leaving Nora and Helmer to confront each other in isolation. Here the elimination of Dr. Rank is prepared for.

(20) The theme again of a rationally understandable fate from the past, like the curse upon the house of Atreus from the crimes of its ancestors in Greek drama.

NORA [*putting her hands over her ears*]. Rubbish! Do talk of something cheerful.

RANK. Oh, it's a mere laughing matter, the whole thing. My poor innocent spine has to suffer for my father's youthful amusements.

⁽²¹⁾NORA [*sitting at the table on the left*]. I suppose you mean that he was too partial to asparagus and pâté de foie gras, don't you?

RANK. Yes, and to truffles.

NORA. Truffles, yes. And oysters too, I suppose?

RANK. Oysters, of course, that goes without saying.

NORA. And heaps of port and champagne. It is sad that all these nice things should take their revenge on our bones.

RANK. Especially that they should revenge themselves on the unlucky bones of those who have not had the satisfaction of enjoying them.

NORA. Yes, that's the saddest part of it all.

RANK [*with a searching look at her*]. Hm!—

NORA [*after a short pause*]. Why did you smile?

RANK. No, it was you that laughed.

NORA. No, it was you that smiled, Doctor Rank!

RANK [*rising*]. You are a greater rascal than I thought. ⁽²¹⁾

NORA. I am in a silly mood today.

RANK. So it seems.

⁽²²⁾NORA [*putting her hands on his shoulders*]. Dear, dear Doctor Rank, death mustn't take you away from Torvald and me. ⁽²²⁾

⁽²³⁾RANK. It is a loss you would easily recover from. Those who are gone are soon forgotten.

NORA [*looking at him anxiously*]. Do you believe that?

RANK. People form new ties, and then—

NORA. Who will form new ties? ⁽²³⁾

RANK. Both you and Helmer, when I am gone. You yourself are already on the high road to it, I think. What did that Mrs. Linde want here last night?

NORA. Oho!—you don't mean to say that you are jealous of poor Christine?

RANK. Yes, I am. She will be my successor in this house. When I am done for, this woman will—

(21) Nora initiates an atmosphere of intimacy, preparatory to her request, by skirting with knowing roguery about a forbidden topic for a woman with a man, the transmitted disease of which she is perfectly aware. The entire scene with Dr. Rank shows Nora in her least admirable light. She deliberately creates the atmosphere of intimacy and plays upon Dr. Rank with her femininity to get what she wants. It is a variation upon the technique she has learned to employ with Helmer, but peculiarly unjustifiable with Dr. Rank. Ibsen does not point the interpretation; he presents Nora as she is and the conditioning factors, and leaves interpretation to the insight of the audience. The scene with Dr. Rank is essential to forceful presentation of the theme of the play. Nora's rebellion is justified by the fact that, as she says, her husband has committed a great sin against her in failing to recognize her mind. As a result, she realizes, she is not the kind of person she ought to be and is capable of being. For Nora's analysis of the situation to carry conviction it is necessary for the audience to have seen the unadmirable effects of her life as well as her potentiality for development. Crises bring out the extremes of character. Presumably Nora had always been frank and honest with Dr. Rank before; in her crucial need she did not risk playing fairly, as Dr. Rank deserved, but descended to trickery.

(22) Nora's sincere warm-hearted affection for Dr. Rank breaks through.

(23) Further psychological preparation for Nora's resolve of suicide.

NORA. Hush! don't speak so loud. She is in that room.

RANK. Today again. There, you see.

NORA. She has only come to sew my dress for me. Bless my soul, how unreasonable you are! [*Sits down on the sofa.*] ⁽²⁴⁾Be nice now, Doctor Rank, and tomorrow you will see how beautifully I shall dance, and you can imagine I am doing it all for you—and for Torvald too, of course. [*Takes various things out of the box.*] Doctor Rank, come and sit down here, and I will show you something.

RANK [*sitting down*]. What is it?

NORA. Just look at those!

RANK. Silk stockings.

NORA. Flesh-coloured. Aren't they lovely? It is so dark here now, but tomorrow—. No, no, no! you must only look at the feet. Oh, well, you may have leave to look at the legs too.

RANK. Hm!—

NORA. Why are you looking so critical? Don't you think they will fit me?

RANK. I have no means of forming an opinion about that.

NORA [*looks at him for a moment*]. For shame! [*Hits him lightly on the ear with the stockings.*] That's to punish you. [*Folds them up again.*]

RANK. And what other nice things am I to be allowed to see?

NORA. Not a single thing more, for being so naughty. [*She looks among the things, humming to herself.*] ⁽²⁴⁾

RANK [*after a short silence*]. When I am sitting here, talking to you as intimately as this, I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house.

NORA [*smiling*]. I believe you do feel thoroughly at home with us.

RANK [*in a lower voice, looking straight in front of him*]. And to be obliged to leave it all—

NORA. Nonsense, you are not going to leave it.

⁽²⁵⁾RANK [*as before*]. And not be able to leave behind one the slightest token of one's gratitude, scarcely even a fleeting

(24) Deliberate flirtatiousness to prepare Dr. Rank to respond to her request.

(25) Dr. Rank quite naturally and unconsciously makes the opening for Nora's request.

regret—nothing but an empty place which the first comer can fill as well as any other.⁽²⁵⁾

NORA. And if I asked you now for a—? No!

RANK. For what?

NORA. For a big proof of your friendship—

RANK. Yes, yes!

NORA. I mean a tremendously big favor—

RANK. Would you really make me so happy for once?

NORA. Ah, but you don't know what it is yet.

RANK. No—but tell me.

NORA. I really can't, Doctor Rank. It is something out of all reason; it means advice, and help, and a favor—

RANK. The bigger a thing it is the better. I can't conceive what it is you mean. Do tell me. Haven't I your confidence?

⁽²⁶⁾NORA. More than anyone else. I know you are my truest and best friend, and so I will tell you what it is. Well, Doctor Rank, it is something you must help me to prevent. You know how devotedly, how inexpressibly deeply Torvald loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.⁽²⁶⁾

⁽²⁷⁾RANK [*leaning toward her*]. Nora—do you think he is the only one—?

NORA [*with a slight start*]. The only one—?

RANK. The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake.

NORA [*sadly*]. Is that it?

RANK. I was determined you should know it before I went away, and there will never be a better opportunity than this. Now you know it, Nora. And now you know, too, that you can trust me as you would trust no one else.

NORA [*rises, deliberately and quietly*]. Let me pass.

RANK [*makes room for her to pass him, but sits still*]. Nora!

NORA [*at the hall door*]. Helen, bring in the lamp. [*Goes over to the stove.*] Dear Doctor Rank, that was really horrid of you.

RANK. To have loved you as much as anyone else does? Was that horrid?

(26) The sincerity and frankness again, which would have been sufficient with Dr. Rank had Nora only relied on it from the start.

(27) There is not much in *A Doll's House* that dates, but a little historical recollection is necessary for appreciation of Nora's reaction here. Nowadays a married woman would be complimented by an avowal of love from a man not her husband so impeccable as this, in which Dr. Rank offered only to serve and asked nothing for himself. In Nora's time it was an insult. Nora's hypocrisy, however, is perfectly apparent. She played upon Dr. Rank's feeling for her while refusing to admit fully to her own consciousness her recognition of the nature of that feeling. After leading Dr. Rank on, her retreat and refusal to accept the consequence of her own conduct is at once cowardly, and with something of nobility in it, when one considers how desperately she felt the need of Dr. Rank's aid. Her attempt to find a way out through Dr. Rank has failed.

NORA. No, but to go and tell me so. There was really no need—

RANK. What do you mean? Did you know—? [MAID enters with lamp, puts it down on the table, and goes out.]
Nora—Mrs. Helmer—tell me had you any idea of this?

NORA. Oh, how do I know whether I had or whether I hadn't. I really can't tell you— To think you could be so clumsy, Doctor Rank! We were getting on so nicely.

RANK. Well, at all events you know that you can command me, body and soul. So won't you speak out?

NORA [*looking at him*]. After what happened?

RANK. I beg you to let me know what it is.

NORA. I can't tell you anything now.

RANK. Yes, yes. You mustn't punish me in that way. Let me have permission to do for you whatever a man may do.

NORA. You can do nothing for me now. Besides, I really don't need any help at all. You will find that the whole thing is merely fancy on my part. It really is so—of course it is! [*Sits down in the rocking-chair, and looks at him with a smile.*] You are a nice sort of man, Doctor Rank!—don't you feel ashamed of yourself, now the lamp has come?⁽²⁷⁾

RANK. Not a bit. But perhaps I had better go—forever?

NORA. No, indeed, you shall not. Of course you must come here just as before. You know very well Torvald can't do without you.

RANK. Yes, but you?

NORA. Oh, I am always tremendously pleased when you come.

⁽²⁸⁾RANK. It is just that, that put me on the wrong track. You are a riddle to me. I have often thought that you would almost as soon be in my company as in Helmer's.

NORA. Yes—you see there are some people one loves best, and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions.

RANK. Yes, there is something in that.

NORA. When I was at home, of course I loved papa best. But I always thought it tremendous fun if I could steal down into the maids' room, because they never moralized at all,

(28) Prepares for Nora's analysis later of her married life as arrested development, a continuation of the parental relationship. The statement here is introduced naturally by Dr. Rank's question.

and talked to each other about such entertaining things.

RANK. I see—it is *their* place I have taken.

NORA [*jumping up and going to him*]. Oh, dear, nice Doctor Rank, I never meant that at all. But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little like being with papa—⁽²⁸⁾

⁽²⁹⁾ [*Enter MAID from the hall.*]

MAID. If you please, ma'am. [*Whispers and hands her a card.*]

NORA [*glancing at the card*]. Oh! [*Puts it in her pocket.*]

RANK. Is there anything wrong?

NORA. No, no, not in the least. It is only something—it is my new dress—

RANK. What? Your dress is lying there.

NORA. Oh, yes, that one; but this is another. I ordered it. Torvald mustn't know about it—

RANK. Oh! Then that was the great secret.

NORA. Of course. Just go in to him; he is sitting in the inner room. Keep him as long as—

RANK. Make your mind easy; I won't let him escape. [*Goes into HELMER'S room.*]

NORA [*to the MAID*]. And he is standing waiting in the kitchen?

MAID. Yes; he came up the back stairs.

NORA. But didn't you tell him no one was in?

MAID. Yes, but it was no good.

NORA. He won't go away?

MAID. No; he says he won't until he has seen you, ma'am.

NORA. Well, let him come in—but quietly. Helen, you mustn't say anything about it to anyone. It is a surprise for my husband.

MAID. Yes, ma'am, I quite understand. [*Exit.*]

NORA. This dreadful thing is going to happen! It will happen in spite of me! No, no, no, it can't happen—it shan't happen! [*She bolts the door of HELMER'S room. The MAID opens the hall door for KROGSTAD and shuts it after him. He is wearing a fur coat, high boots and a fur cap.*]⁽²⁹⁾

(29) Krogstad's entrance is prepared for and made natural, the stage is cleared, interruption is secured against, and suspense is created. His entrance within the time period of the continuous scene of Act II was prepared for by Helmer's having written the dismissal and given it to the maid with instructions to call a messenger for immediate delivery.

NORA [*advancing towards him*]. Speak low—my husband is at home.

KROG. No matter about that.

NORA. What do you want of me?

KROG. An explanation of something.

NORA. Make haste then. What is it?

KROG. You know, I suppose, that I have got my dismissal.

NORA. I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought as hard as I could on your side, but it was no good.

KROG. Does your husband love you so little, then? He knows what I can expose you to, and yet he ventures—

NORA. How can you suppose that he has any knowledge of the sort?

⁽⁸⁰⁾KROG. I didn't suppose so at all. It would not be the least like our dear Torvald Helmer to show so much courage—⁽⁸⁰⁾

NORA. Mr. Krogstad, a little respect for my husband, please.

KROG. Certainly—all the respect he deserves. But since you have kept the matter so carefully to yourself, I make bold to suppose that you have a little clearer idea, than you had yesterday, of what it actually is that you have done?

NORA. More than you could ever teach me.

KROG. Yes, such a bad lawyer as I am.

NORA. What is it you want of me?

KROG. Only to see how you were, Mrs. Helmer. I have been thinking about you all day long. A mere cashier, a quill-driver, a—well, a man like me—even he has a little of what is called feeling, you know.

NORA. Show it, then; think of my little children.

KROG. Have you and your husband thought of mine? But never mind about that. I only wanted to tell you that you need not take this matter too seriously. In the first place there will be no accusation made on my part.

NORA. No, of course not; I was sure of that.

KROG. The whole thing can be arranged amicably; there is no reason why anyone should know anything about it. It will remain a secret between us three.

(30) Preparation for Helmer's failure of courage at the crisis. Krogstad is intelligent and really knows his man.

NORA. My husband must never get to know anything about it.

KROG. How will you be able to prevent it? Am I to understand that you can pay the balance that is owing?

NORA. No, not just at present.

KROG. Or perhaps that you have some expedient for raising the money soon?

NORA. No expedient that I mean to make use of.

KROG. Well, in any case, it would have been of no use to you now. If you stood there with ever so much money in your hand, I would never part with your bond.

NORA. Tell me what purpose you mean to put it to.

KROG. I shall only preserve it—keep it in my possession. No one who is not concerned in the matter shall have the slightest hint of it. ⁽⁸¹⁾So that if the thought of it has driven you to any desperate resolution—

NORA. It has.

KROG. If you had it in your mind to run away from your home—

NORA. I had.

KROG. Or even something worse—

NORA. How could you know that?

KROG. Give up the idea.

NORA. How did you know I had thought of *that*?

KROG. Most of us think of that at first. I did, too—but I hadn't the courage.

NORA [*faintly*]. No more than I.

KROG. [*in a tone of relief*]. No, that's it, isn't it—you hadn't the courage either?

NORA. No, I haven't—I haven't. ⁽⁸¹⁾

KROG. Besides, it would have been a great piece of folly. Once the first storm at home is over— I have a letter for your husband in my pocket.

NORA. Telling him everything?

KROG. In as lenient a manner as I possibly could.

NORA [*quickly*]. He mustn't get the letter. Tear it up. I will find some means of getting money.

KROG. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer, but I think I told you just now—

(31) Prepares for Nora's final decision of suicide. It is necessary to place Nora's intention of suicide clearly in the audience's mind in advance of the crisis of the play in order that it need not be dwelt upon at that point. It is also necessary to present enough preparation of Nora's mind by suggestion from outside her own thoughts to make her intention of suicide convincing; a purpose of suicide usually grows by dwelling upon the idea, even upon its horrors, as here. Krogstad's shrewd insight into other people's minds offers an adequately convincing device for introducing the idea here.

NORA. I am not speaking of what I owe you. Tell me what sum you are asking my husband for, and I will get the money.

KROG. I am not asking your husband for a penny.

NORA. What do you want, then?

⁽⁸²⁾KROG. I will tell you. I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. For the last year and a half I have not had a hand in anything dishonorable, and all that time I have been struggling in most restricted circumstances. I was content to work my way up step by step. Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favor again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me—

NORA. That he will never do!

KROG. He will; I know him; he dare not protest. And as soon as I am in there again with him, then you will see! Within a year I shall be the manager's right hand. It will be Nils Krogstad and not Torvald Helmer who manages the Bank.⁽⁸²⁾

NORA. That's a thing you will never see!

⁽⁸³⁾KROG. Do you mean that you will—?

NORA. I have courage enough for it now.

KROG. Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you—

NORA. You will see, you will see.

KROG. Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out—

NORA. You can't frighten me.

KROG. Nor you me. People don't do such things, Mrs. Helmer. Besides, what use would it be? I should have him completely in my power all the same.

NORA. Afterwards? When I am no longer—⁽⁸⁸⁾

KROG. Have you forgotten that it is I who have the keeping of your reputation? [NORA *stands speechlessly looking at him.*] Well, now, I have warned you. Do not do any-

(32) The first complication of the act, Nora's direct attempt upon Helmer, was resolved in a new complication, Helmer's immediate dispatch of Krogstad's dismissal. That complication produces a further complication in Krogstad's counterattack. The action is compressed into a single continuous scene by the device of having the dismissal delivered by messenger instead of by post, so that Krogstad has time to receive it and come to the Helmers' home in response within the period of the act. Helmer's way of sending the dismissal is justified psychologically by putting him in a mood of unreasoning impatience. The time interval before Krogstad's entrance is covered by another complication, that of Nora's attempt with Dr. Rank. Krogstad's increased demand creates an even more serious threat for Nora. At the same time it reveals Krogstad as a complex and interesting character—and a formidable opponent.

(33) Krogstad's move advances the action on Nora's part, to resolve on suicide if necessary.

thing foolish. When Helmer has had my letter, I shall expect a message from him. ⁽³⁴⁾ And be sure you remember that it is your husband himself who has forced me into such ways as this again. I will never forgive him for that. ⁽³⁴⁾ Good-bye, Mrs. Helmer. [*Exit through the hall.*]

⁽³⁵⁾ NORA [*goes to the hall door, opens it slightly and listens*]. He is going. He is not putting the letter in the box. Oh, no, no! that's impossible! [*Opens the door by degrees.*] What is that? He is standing outside. He is not going downstairs. Is he hesitating? Can he—? ⁽³⁵⁾ ⁽³⁶⁾ [*A letter drops in the box; then KROGSTAD's footsteps are heard, till they die away as he goes downstairs. NORA utters a stifled cry, and runs across the room to the table by the sofa. A short pause.*]

NORA. In the letter-box. [*Steals across to the hall door.*] There it lies—Torvald, Torvald, there is no hope for us now! ⁽³⁶⁾

⁽³⁷⁾ [MRS. LINDE comes in from the room on the left, carrying the dress.]

MRS. L. There, I can't see anything more to mend now. Would you like to try it on—? ⁽³⁷⁾

⁽³⁸⁾ NORA [*in a hoarse whisper*]. Christine, come here.

MRS. L. [*throwing the dress down on the sofa*]. What is the matter with you? You look so agitated!

NORA. Come here. Do you see that letter? There, look—you can see it through the glass in the letter-box.

MRS. L. Yes, I see it.

NORA. That letter is from Krogstad.

MRS. L. Nora—it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

NORA. Yes, and now Torvald will know all about it.

MRS. L. Believe me, Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

NORA. You don't know all. I forged a name. ⁽³⁸⁾

MRS. L. Good heavens—!

⁽³⁹⁾ NORA. I only want to say this to you, Christine—you must be my witness.

MRS. L. Your witness? What do you mean? What am I to—?

(34) Further revelation of Krogstad's complexity of character, with a suggestion of the war between good and evil in him which prepares for his reform.

(35) Elaboration of detail for intensification of suspense at a crisis.

(36) The climax and resolution of the complication, with Nora's situation made more definite and desperate.

(37) Dramatic contrast between Nora's situation and Mrs. Linde's casual interruption over the trivial matter of a dress.

(38) Mrs. Linde, by her accidental presence at the time, and by her former intimate relation to Nora and Nora's need of a confidant, has been steadily drawn into closer relation to the drama. Now her knowledge of the situation is complete, and by her former relation to Krogstad, she is shortly incorporated into the action itself.

(39) In this transition from the Krogstad complication to the next complication of the counterattack through Mrs. Linde, Ibsen accomplishes four things: (1) Exposition of Nora's intention of suicide when the forgery is revealed to Helmer, and the reason for it: she believes Helmer will ruin himself by assuming responsibility for the forgery to shield her, and that her suicide will convince everyone of her guilt and save Helmer. It is important that Nora's intention be made clear in advance in order for the crucial moment to be sharply focused. (2) Introduction of the key to understanding of Nora's character and of the play, the theme of "the wonderful thing," on which the play is focused in the resolution. (3) Mrs. Linde is drawn into the action. (4) Suspense is created.

NORA. If I should go out of my mind—and it might easily happen—

MRS. L. Nora!

NORA. Or if anything else should happen to me—anything, for instance, that might prevent my being here—

MRS. L. Nora! Nora! you are quite out of your mind.

NORA. And if it should happen that there were someone who wanted to take all the responsibility, all the blame, you understand—

MRS. L. Yes, yes—but how can you suppose—?

NORA. Then you must be my witness, that is not true, Christine. I am not out of my mind at all; I am in my right senses now, and I tell you no one else has known anything about it; I, and I alone, did the whole thing. Remember that.

MRS. L. I will, indeed. But I don't understand all this.

NORA. How should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen.

MRS. L. A wonderful thing?

NORA. Yes, a wonderful thing!—But it is so terrible. Christine; it *mustn't* happen, not for all the world.⁽³⁹⁾

MRS. L. I will go at once and see Krogstad.

NORA. Don't go to him; he will do you some harm.

⁽⁴⁰⁾MRS. L. There was a time when he would gladly do anything for my sake.⁽⁴⁰⁾

NORA. He?

MRS. L. Where does he live?

NORA. How should I know—? Yes, [*feeling in her pocket*] here is his card. But the letter, the letter—!

⁽⁴¹⁾HEL. [*calls from his room, knocking at the door*]. Nora!

NORA [*cries out anxiously*]. Oh, what's that? What do you want?

HEL. Don't be so frightened. We are not coming in; you have locked the door. Are you trying on your dress?

NORA. Yes, that's it. I look so nice, Torvald.

⁽⁴²⁾MRS. L. [*who has read the card*]. I see he lives at the corner here.

NORA. Yes, but it's no use. It is hopeless. The letter is lying there in the box.

(40) Antecedent material, prepared for in previous references to Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's former acquaintance, but made explicit only when it is needed, and can be introduced dramatically.

(41) The interruption from Helmer adds tension to the conclusion of the scene between Nora and Mrs. Linde, and prepares for bringing Helmer and Dr. Rank on the stage immediately on Mrs. Linde's exit.

(42) Exposition of the mail-box situation, and of the closeness of Krogstad's home which allows Mrs. Linde to reenter within the time interval of the act.

MRS. L. And your husband keeps the key?

NORA. Yes, always.⁽⁴²⁾

⁽⁴³⁾MRS. L. Krogstad must ask for his letter back unread, he must find some pretence—

NORA. But it is just at this time that Torvald generally—

MRS. L. You must delay him. Go in to him in the meantime. I will come back as soon as I can. [*She goes out hurriedly through the hall door.*]⁽⁴³⁾

NORA [*goes to HELMER'S door, opens it and peeps in*]. Torvald!

HEL. [*from the inner room*]. Well? May I venture at last to come into my own room again? Come along, Rank, now you will see— [*Halting in the doorway.*]⁽⁴⁴⁾ But what is this?

NORA. What is what, dear?

HEL. Rank led me to expect a splendid transformation.

RANK [*in the doorway*]. I understood so, but evidently I was mistaken.

NORA. Yes, nobody is to have the chance of admiring me in my dress until tomorrow.⁽⁴⁴⁾

HEL. But, my dear Nora, you look so worn out. Have you been practising too much?

NORA. No, I have not practised at all.

HEL. But you will need to—

NORA. Yes, indeed I shall, Torvald. But I can't get on a bit without you to help me; I have absolutely forgotten the whole thing.

HEL. Oh, we will soon work it up again.

⁽⁴⁵⁾NORA. Yes, help me, Torvald. Promise that you will! I am so nervous about it—all the people—. You must give yourself up to me entirely this evening. Not the tiniest bit of business—you mustn't even take a pen in your hand. Will you promise, Torvald dear?

HEL. I promise. This evening I will be wholly and absolutely at your service, you helpless little mortal.⁽⁴⁵⁾ ⁽⁴⁶⁾ Ah, by the way, first of all I will just— [*Goes towards the hall door.*]

NORA. What are you going to do there?

HEL. Only see if any letters have come.

(43) A double attack, Mrs. Linde's attempt with Krogstad, and Nora's effort to delay Helmer from getting his mail, the second complication filling the time interval necessary for the first.

(44) Within the larger complication a minor complication which creates a momentary suspense: the question, will Nora get out of the inconsistency? She does so with quick wit.

(45) Nora begins the rising action of her complication, to delay Helmer. She uses her usual method of playing upon his sense of superiority, to which he responds in a characterizing manner.

(46) A minor complication of sharp tension, with a perfect and complete dramatic structure: attack when Helmer states his intention of looking for letters; crisis when Nora stops him with the Tarantella; resolution when Helmer agrees to help her and sits down at the piano. There is dramatic irony for the audience, knowing that Nora is playing upon him, in Helmer's repeated complacent acceptance of his own superiority. As the play approaches the crucial revelation of Helmer's character in the next act, Ibsen begins to accumulate preparatory revelations of his egotism, with the irony of his complacency and sense of security.

NORA. No, no! don't do that, Torvald!

HEL. Why not?

NORA. Torvald, please don't. There is nothing there.

HEL. Well, let me look. [*Turns to go to the letter-box.*

NORA, *at the piano, plays the first bars of the Tarantella.*

HELMER *stops in the doorway.*] Aha!

NORA. I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practise with you.

HEL. [*going up to her*]. Are you really so afraid of it, dear.

NORA. Yes, so dreadfully afraid of it. Let me practise at once; there is time now, before we go to dinner. Sit down and play for me, Torvald dear; criticise me, and correct me as you play.

HEL. With great pleasure, if you wish me to. [*Sits down at the piano.*]⁽⁴⁶⁾

NORA [*takes out of the box a tambourine and a long variegated shawl. She hastily drapes the shawl round her. Then she springs to the front of the stage and calls out*]. Now play for me! I am going to dance!

[HELMER *plays and NORA dances. RANK stands by the piano behind HELMER, and looks on.*]

HEL. [*as he plays*]. Slower, slower!

NORA. I can't do it any other way.

HEL. Not so violently, Nora!

NORA. This is the way.

HEL. [*stops playing*]. No, no—that is not a bit right.

NORA [*laughing and swinging the tambourine*]. Didn't I tell you so?

RANK. Let me play for her.

⁽⁴⁷⁾HEL. [*getting up*]. Yes, do. I can correct her better then.

⁽⁴⁸⁾[RANK *sits down at the piano and plays. NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER has taken up a position by the stove, and during her dance gives her frequent instructions. She does not seem to hear him; her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders; she pays no attention to it, but goes on dancing. Enter MRS. LINDE.*]

(47) Again, Helmer's ready pleasure in the sense of superiority that goes with correcting someone else.

(48) The picturesque element of the dance on the stage is good theatre. At the same time it creates a dramatic peak, completely revealing Nora's desperate tension. It also helps to fill the time interval for Mrs. Linde's return and makes a good situation for her entrance. There is dramatic irony in Nora's "So it does," in response to Helmer's "You are dancing as if your life depended upon it." Nora's statement to Mrs. Linde a little later, "I could tell from your face," constitutes a stage direction within the text: when Nora suddenly stands still, she is facing Mrs. Linde and the two women stand for a moment looking straight at each other; then Nora's tension breaks, to go into a new mood.

MRS. L. [*standing as if spell-bound in the doorway*].
Oh!—

NORA [*as she dances*]. Such fun, Christine!

HEL. My dear darling Nora, you are dancing as if your life depended on it.

NORA. So it does.

HEL. Stop, Rank; this is sheer madness. Stop, I tell you!
[*RANK stops playing, and NORA suddenly stands still. HELMER goes up to her.*]⁽⁴⁸⁾ I could never have believed it. You have forgotten everything I taught you.

NORA [*throwing away the tambourine*]. There, you see.

HEL. You will want a lot of coaching.

NORA. Yes, you see how much I need it. You must coach me up to the last minute. Promise me that, Torvald!

HEL. You can depend on me.

⁽⁴⁹⁾NORA. You must not think of anything but me, either today or tomorrow; you mustn't open a single letter—not even open the letter-box—

HEL. Ah, you are still afraid of that fellow—

NORA. Yes, indeed I am.

HEL. Nora, I can tell from your looks that there is a letter from him lying there.

NORA. I don't know; I think there is; but you must not read anything of that kind now. Nothing horrid must come between us till this is all over.

RANK [*whispers to HELMER*]. You mustn't contradict her.

HEL. [*taking her in his arms*]. The child shall have her way. But tomorrow night, after you have danced—

NORA. Then you will be free. [*The MAID appears in the doorway to the right.*]

MAID. Dinner is served, ma'am.

NORA. We will have champagne, Helen.

MAID. Very good, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

HEL. Hullo!—are we going to have a banquet?

NORA. Yes, a champagne banquet till the small hours. [*Calls out.*] And a few macaroons, Helen—lots, just for once!

(49) When Nora says, "You must not think of anything but me," she is no longer playing upon Helmer, it is an utterly sincere and pathetic appeal. She is convinced of the inevitability of the revelation of the forgery, that that will be the end of her life with Helmer, and she seeks an unmarred beauty to the end.

HEL. Come, come, don't be so wild and nervous. Be my own little skylark, as you used.⁽⁴⁹⁾

⁽⁵⁰⁾NORA. Yes, dear, I will. But go in now and you too, Doctor Rank. Christine, you must help me to do up my hair.⁽⁵⁰⁾

RANK [*whispers to HELMER as they go out*]. I suppose there is nothing—she is not expecting anything?

⁽⁵¹⁾HEL. Far from it, my dear fellow; it is simply nothing more than this childish nervousness I was telling you of.⁽⁵¹⁾ [*They go into the right-hand room.*]

NORA. Well!

⁽⁵²⁾MRS. L. Gone out of town.

NORA. I could tell from your face.

⁽⁵³⁾MRS. L. He is coming home tomorrow evening. I wrote a note for him.

⁽⁵⁴⁾NORA. You should have let it alone; you must prevent nothing. After all, it is splendid to be waiting for a wonderful thing to happen.⁽⁵⁴⁾

MRS. L. What is it that you are waiting for?

NORA. Oh, you wouldn't understand. Go in to them, I will come in a moment. [*MRS. LINDE goes into the dining-room. NORA stands still for a little while, as if to compose herself. Then she looks at her watch.*] Five o'clock. Seven hours till midnight; and then four-and-twenty hours till the next midnight. Then the Tarantella will be over. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live.

HEL. [*from the doorway on the right*]. Where's my little skylark?

⁽⁵⁵⁾NORA [*going to him with her arms outstretched*]. Here she is!

ACT III

THE SAME SCENE.—*The table has been placed in the middle of the stage, with chairs round it. A lamp is burning on the table. The door into the hall stands open.* ⁽¹⁾*Dance music is heard in the room above. MRS. LINDE is sitting at the table idly turning over the leaves of a book; she tries to read, but does not seem able to collect her thoughts. Every now and then she listens intently for a sound at the outer door.*

(50) Clearing the stage for Nora and Mrs. Linde.

(51) Irony.

(52) A new complication, which resolves the third attempt at a way out in defeat for Nora.

(53) Mrs. Linde's attempt with Krogstad is revived and creates a carry-over suspense for the curtain of the act.

(54) Nora's energy has been exhausted by three successive failures, and the sense of inevitability has grown upon her. The wild practice of the Tarantella was a last fierce beating of her wings in resistance, and purged her emotionally of the desire for a life in which beauty would forever be marred by her own consciousness of concealment. In its place comes the expectation of "the wonderful thing," a consciousness of complete love and devotion, which to Nora is the highest beauty.

(55) Nora's curtain line and exit is poignantly childlike. For her husband to have gratified his own ego by keeping a woman of Nora's capacities nothing but a child, his little squirrel and skylark, was a great injustice. At this moment Nora's whole being as a woman rightly cries out for dependence upon sustaining strength.

ACT III

(1) The remote sound of dance music is a good background for Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's scene, and prepares for the entrance of Nora and Helmer from the costume ball.

⁽²⁾MRS. L. [*looking at her watch*]. Not yet—and the time is nearly up. If only he does not—. [*Listens again.*] Ah, there he is.⁽²⁾ [*Goes into the hall and opens the outer door carefully. Light footsteps are heard on the stairs. She whispers.*] Come in. There is no one here.

KROG. [*in the doorway*]. I found a note from you at home. What does this mean?

MRS. L. It is absolutely necessary that I should have a talk with you.

⁽³⁾KROG. Really? And it is absolutely necessary that it should be here?

MRS. L. It is impossible where I live; there is no private entrance to my rooms.⁽³⁾ ⁽⁴⁾Come in; we are quite alone. The maid is asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.⁽⁴⁾

KROG. [*coming into the room*]. Are the Helmers really at a dance tonight?

MRS. L. Yes, why not?

KROG. Certainly—why not?

⁽⁵⁾MRS. L. Now, Nils, let us have a talk.

KROG. Can we two have anything to talk about.

MRS. L. We have a great deal to talk about.

KROG. I shouldn't have thought so.

MRS. L. No, you have never properly understood me.

KROG. Was there anything else to understand except what was obvious to all the world—a heartless woman jilts a man when a more lucrative chance turns up.

MRS. L. Do you believe I am as absolutely heartless as all that? And do you believe it with a light heart?

KROG. Didn't you?

MRS. L. Nils, did you really think that?

KROG. If it were as you say, why did you write to me as you did at the time?

MRS. L. I could do nothing else. As I had to break with you, it was my duty also to put an end to all that you felt for me.

KROG. [*wringing his hands*]. So that was it. And all this—only for the sake of money!

MRS. L. You mustn't forget that I had a helpless mother

(2) Mrs. Linde has not been built up, like Nora, as a person who talks to herself, and the few lines of soliloquy are actually unnecessary; the stage business would accomplish the opening suspense just as effectively.

(3) Exposition of the device by which Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's scene is brought into the single continuous staging of the act.

(4) Exposition of where Nora and Helmer are, which acquaints the audience with the time, assures them of the privacy of Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's conversation, and prepares for Nora's and Helmer's entrance.

(5) The business of Act II was to prepare Nora's mind, in the course of her successive failures to avert revelation of the forgery, to expect and accept "the wonderful thing," and to arrive at her decision of how to meet it. The opening part of the third act continues the rising action to the revelation of the forgery, which brings about the crisis of the revelation of Helmer's character, a reversal of Nora's expectation. The scene between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad strips away the last possibility that the revelation to Helmer of the forgery will be averted, and changes the question for suspense from, Will the forgery be concealed? to What will happen when it is revealed? The more complicated carry-over suspense, with one more possibility of Helmer's not receiving the letter, is desirable for the audience between acts, and what is more important, keeps Nora's mind in a poised state during the interval. The Mrs. Linde-Krogstad situation also removes precipitation of the crisis from dependence on the accident of Krogstad's being away from home the preceding evening. The crisis is brought about by Mrs. Linde's decision from what she has seen in the household that concealment should end; that is, the effect upon the lives of Nora and Helmer of concealment leads to its end.

For rhythm of mood and stage effect, the minor note of the scene is good at the opening of Act III after the tempestuous close of Act II with the Tarantella; the sub-plot is resolved and out of the way before the final centering of the play on the crisis and resolution of the main plot; the

[Continued on page 289]

and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils; your prospects seemed hopeless then.

KROG. That may be so, but you had no right to throw me over for any one else's sake.

MRS. L. Indeed I don't know. Many a time did I ask myself if I had the right to do it.

KROG. [*more gently*]. When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground went from under my feet. Look at me now—I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage.

MRS. L. But help may be near.

KROG. It *was* near; but then you came and stood in my way.

MRS. L. Unintentionally, Nils. It was only today that I learnt it was your place I was going to take in the bank.

KROG. I believe you, if you say so. But now that you know it, are you not going to give it up to me?

MRS. L. No, because that would not benefit you in the least.

KROG. Oh, benefit, benefit—I would have done it whether or no.

MRS. L. I have learnt to act prudently. Life, and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

KROG. And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches.

MRS. L. Then life has taught you something very reasonable. But deeds you must believe in?

KROG. What do you mean by that?

MRS. L. You said you were like a shipwrecked man clinging to some wreckage.

KROG. I had good reason to say so.

MRS. L. Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage—no one to mourn for, no one to care for.

KROG. It was your own choice.

MRS. L. There was no other choice—then.

KROG. Well, what now?

MRS. L. Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?

KROG. What are you saying?

argument against concealment is accented by the openness between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad with its happy result; and the theme of self-realization in the play is given content in both Mrs. Linde's and Krogstad's recognition of self-realization through work which is unself-centered.

The antecedent material of Krogstad's history with Mrs. Linde makes his reform convincing. His reform is necessary, as it is his second letter with the return of the bond to Helmer, by which he sees himself saved, that precipitates the final and most damning revelation of Helmer's character.

MRS. L. Two on the same pieces of wreckage would stand a better chance than each on their own.

KROG. Christine!

MRS. L. What do you suppose brought me to town?

KROG. Do you mean that you gave me a thought?

MRS. L. I could not endure life without work. All my life, as long as I can remember, I have worked, and it has been my greatest and only pleasure. But now I am quite alone in the world—my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least pleasure in working for one's self. Nils, give me someone and something to work for.

KROG. I don't trust that. It is nothing but a woman's overstrained sense of generosity that prompts you to make such an offer of yourself.

MRS. L. Have you ever noticed anything of the sort in me?

KROG. Could you really do it? Tell me—do you know all about my past life?

MRS. L. Yes.

KROG. And do you know what they think of me here?

MRS. L. You seemed to me to imply that with me you might have been quite another man.

KROG. I am certain of it.

MRS. L. Is it too late now?

KROG. Christine, are you saying this deliberately? Yes, I am sure you are. I see it in your face. Have you really the courage, then—?

MRS. L. I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other. Nils, I have faith in your real character—I can dare anything with you.

KROG. [*grasps her hands*]. Thanks, thanks, Christine! Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world. Ah, but I forgot—

MRS. L. [*listening*]. Hush! The Tarantella! Go, go!

KROG. Why? What is it?

MRS. L. Do you hear them up there? When that is over, we may expect them back.

KROG. Yes, yes—I will go. But it is all no use. Of

(5) [*continued*]. The scene between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, from page 286 to page 292, has been analyzed in its relation to the play as a whole. In a play of the compact structural type of *A Doll's House*, built closely around a few characters in intimate relation, a scene of this length in which no principal character appears is unusual, and must be very well written if it is not to let down the audience's attention, to leave a hole in the play. The integration of the scene with the main plot has been shown. Its essential function is to bring about the change of heart in Krogstad, which is determinative in the outcome of the play. Such a reformation demands the length of scene to be convincing, as there must be full development of characterization and motivation. Ibsen excels in his handling of the problem of minor characters; by the end of this scene, his last appearance, Krogstad is as fully alive and individualized as Nora or Helmer. A character portrait is not enough, however, to hold the attention of the audience; the scene plays with notable success because we see character in movement under the stress of a dramatic situation. This scene is developed with the whole basic structure of a play. First, there is an introduction for exposition of antecedent material, which is brought in under the tension of the introductory dramatic question of why Mrs. Linde had jilted Krogstad. That question is resolved and leads into an attack in Mrs. Linde's proposal that she and Krogstad marry. A rising action in which every line is a furtherance or hindrance, a complication, follows and comes to a crisis in Krogstad's overjoyed acceptance. Immediately, with the sound of the Tarantella, a new complication enters, Krogstad's thought of the action he has taken in relation to the Helmers as a hindrance to Mrs. Linde's marrying him. Mrs. Linde's response leads to fresh doubt in Krogstad's mind, the last hindrance to be overcome. With the resolution of the question of this scene, the marriage of Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, Krogstad's action which is to vitally affect the principal characters is determined.

course you are not aware what steps I have taken in the matter of the Helmers.

MRS. L. Yes, I know all about that.

KROG. And in spite of that have you the courage to—?

MRS. L. I understand very well to what lengths a man like you might be driven by despair.

KROG. If I could only undo what I have done!

MRS. L. You cannot. Your letter is lying in the letter-box now.

KROG. Are you sure of that?

MRS. L. Quite sure, but—

KROG. [*with a searching look at her*]. Is that what it all means?—that you want to save your friend at any cost? Tell me frankly. Is that it?

MRS. L. Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time.

KROG. I will ask for my letter back.

MRS. L. No, no.

KROG. Yes, of course I will. I will wait here till Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back—that it only concerns my dismissal—that he is not to read it—

⁽⁶⁾MRS. L. No, Nils, you must not recall your letter.

KROG. But, tell me, wasn't it for that very purpose that you asked me to meet you here?

MRS. L. In my first moment of fright, it was. But twenty-four hours have elapsed since then, and in that time I have witnessed incredible things in this house. Helmer must know all about it. This unhappy secret must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on.⁽⁶⁾

⁽⁷⁾KROG. Very well, if you will take the responsibility. But there is one thing I can do in any case, and I shall do it at once.⁽⁷⁾

⁽⁸⁾MRS. L. [*listening*]. You must be quick and go! The dance is over; we are not safe a moment longer.

KROG. I will wait for you below.

MRS. L. Yes, do. You must see me back to my door.

KROG. I have never had such an amazing piece of good

(6) It is Mrs. Linde's decision which precipitates the crisis of the play.

(7) Prepares for Krogstad's second letter and return of the bond.

(8) Preparation for Helmer's and Nora's entrance.

fortune in my life! [*Goes out through the outer door. The door between the room and the hall remains open.*]

MRS. L. [*tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready*]. What a difference! What a difference! Someone to work for and live for—a home to bring comfort into. That I will do, indeed. I wish they would be quick and come— [*Listens.*] Ah, there they are now. I must put on my things. [*Takes up her hat and cloak. HELMER's and NORA's voices are heard outside; a key is turned, and HELMER brings NORA almost by force into the hall.*⁽⁸⁾ *She is in an Italian costume with a large black shawl round her; he is in evening dress, and a black domino which is flying open.*]

⁽⁹⁾NORA [*hanging back in the doorway, and struggling with him*]. No, no, no!—don't take me in. I want to go upstairs again; I don't want to leave so early.

HEL. But, my dearest Nora—

NORA. Please, Torvald dear—please, *please*—only an hour more.⁽¹⁰⁾

HEL. Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement. Come along into the room; you are catching cold standing there. [*He brings her gently into the room, in spite of her resistance.*]

MRS. L. Good-evening.

NORA. Christine!

HEL. You here, so late, Mrs. Linde?

MRS. L. Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.

NORA. Have you been sitting here waiting for me?

MRS. L. Yes, unfortunately I came too late, you had already gone upstairs; and I thought I couldn't go away again without having seen you.

HEL. [*taking off NORA's shawl*]. Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs. Linde?

MRS. L. Yes, indeed she is.

HEL. Doesn't she look remarkably pretty? Everyone thought so at the dance. But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person. What are we to do with her? You will hardly believe that I had almost to bring her away by force.

(9) Nora would have held on to the dance and her last joyousness with Helmer as long as possible.

NORA. Torvald, you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour.

⁽¹⁰⁾HEL. Listen to her, Mrs. Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved—although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic—a little more so, I mean, than was strictly compatible with the limitations of art. But never mind about that! The chief thing is, she had made a success—she had made a tremendous success. Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect? No, indeed! I took my charming little Capri maiden—my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say—on my arm; took one quick turn round the room; a curtsy on either side, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared. An exit ought always to be effective, Mrs. Linde; but that is what I cannot make Nora understand.⁽¹⁰⁾ ⁽¹¹⁾Pooh! this room is hot. [*Throws his domino on a chair, and opens the door of his room.*] Hullo! it's all dark in here. Oh, of course—excuse me—. [*He goes in, and lights some candles.*]⁽¹¹⁾

NORA [*in a hurried and breathless whisper*]. Well?

MRS. L. [*in a low voice*]. I have had a talk with him.

NORA. Yes, and—

MRS. L. Nora, you must tell your husband all about it.

NORA [*in an expressionless voice*]. I knew it.

MRS. L. You have nothing to be afraid of as far as Krogstad is concerned; but you must tell him.

NORA. I won't tell him.

MRS. L. Then the letter will.

⁽¹²⁾NORA. Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do. Hush—!⁽¹²⁾

HEL. [*coming in again*]. Well, Mrs. Linde, have you admired her?

MRS. L. Yes, and now I will say good-night.

HEL. What, already? Is this yours, this knitting?

MRS. L. [*taking it*]. Yes, thank you, I had very nearly forgotten it.

⁽¹³⁾HEL. So you knit?

MRS. L. Of course.

(10) Helmer's feeling for perfection, at the same time, his sense of effect before the world more than inner actuality.

(11) Device for getting Helmer off-stage, for Nora to receive the information from Mrs. Linde.

(12) Nora means she must commit suicide. That conclusion on her part is actually unnecessary, since Mrs. Linde has assured her she has nothing to fear from Krogstad, and her suicide was to save Helmer from attempting to shield her before the world. Nora has reached a half-distracted state in which her mind does not actually grasp any alteration from the course of events which she has come to expect as inevitable.

(13) The champagne tinges Helmer's conduct through the scene. His innate egotism in combination with his feeling for perfection comes out here in his rather free elaboration over a trivial matter. Ibsen hardly lets Helmer speak without characterizing himself.

HEL. Do you know, you ought to embroider.

MRS. L. Really? Why?

HEL. Yes, it's far more becoming. Let me show you. You hold the embroidery thus in your left hand, and use the needle with the right—like this—with a long easy sweep. Do you see?

MRS. L. Yes, perhaps—

HEL. Yes, but in the case of knitting—that can never be anything but ungraceful; look here—the arms close together, the knitting-needles going up and down—it has a sort of Chinese effect—. That was really excellent champagne they gave us.⁽¹³⁾

MRS. L. Well,—good-night, Nora, and don't be self-willed any more.

HEL. That's right, Mrs. Linde.

MRS. L. Good-night, Mr. Helmer.

⁽¹⁴⁾HEL. [*accompanying her to the door*]. Good-night, good-night. I hope you will get home all right. I should be very happy to—but you haven't any great distance to go. Good-night, good-night. [*She goes out; he shuts the door after her, and comes in again.*] Ah!—at last we have got rid of her. She is a frightful bore, that woman.⁽¹⁴⁾

NORA. Aren't you very tired, Torvald?

HEL. No, not in the least.

NORA. Nor sleepy?

HEL. Not a bit. On the contrary I feel extraordinarily lively. And you?—you really look both tired and sleepy.

NORA. Yes, I am very tired. I want to go to sleep at once.

HEL. There, you see it was quite right of me not to let you stay there any longer.

NORA. Everything you do is quite right, Torvald.

HEL. [*kissing her on the forehead*]. Now my little skylark is speaking reasonably. ⁽¹⁵⁾Did you notice what good spirits Rank was in this evening?⁽¹⁵⁾

NORA. Really? Was he? I didn't speak to him at all.

HEL. And I very little, but I have not for a long time seen him in such good form. [*Looks for a while at her and then goes nearer to her.*] It is delightful to be at home hy

(14) It is necessary to get Mrs. Linde off-stage and desirable to have no interval without Helmer. The champagne adequately explains his lack of courtesy to Mrs. Linde, by which he is kept on-stage; he acts the way he really feels in his desire to be alone with his wife.

(15) An ironical preparation for Dr. Rank's death; like Nora, he knew he was dancing his last.

ourselves again, to be all alone with you—you fascinating, charming little darling!

NORA. Don't look at me like that, Torvald.

HEL. Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure?—at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?

NORA [*going to the other side of the table*]. You mustn't say things like that to me tonight.

HEL. [*following her*]. You have still got the Tarantella in your blood, I see. And it makes you more captivating than ever. Listen—the guests are beginning to go now. [*In a lower voice.*] Nora—soon the whole house will be quiet.

NORA. Yes, I hope so.

⁽¹⁶⁾HEL. Yes, my own darling Nora. Do you know, that when I am out at a party with you like this, why I speak so little to you, keep away from you, and only send a stolen glance in your direction now and then?—do you know why I do that? It is because I make believe to myself that we are secretly in love, and you are my secretly promised bride, and that no one suspects there is anything between us.

NORA. Yes, yes—I know very well your thoughts are with me all the time.

HEL. And when we are leaving, and I am putting the shawl over your beautiful, young shoulders—on your lovely neck—then I imagine that you are my young bride and that we have just come from our wedding, and I am bringing you, for the first time, into our home—to be alone with you for the first time—quite alone with my shy little darling! All this evening I have longed for nothing but you. When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, and that was why I brought you down so early—⁽¹⁶⁾

⁽¹⁷⁾NORA. Go away, Torvald! You must let me go. I won't—

HEL. What's that? You're joking, my little Nora! You won't—you won't? Am I not your husband—⁽¹⁷⁾ [*A knock is heard at the outer door.*]

NORA [*starting*]. Did you hear—?

HEL. [*going into the hall*]. Who is it?

(16) Helmer's urgent sensual love-making to Nora just before the revelation of the real shallowness of his love builds up a good dramatic contrast, and emphasizes the essential selfishness of his love.

(17) Preparation for the revelation of Helmer's self-centeredness, and dramatic contrast at the moment between Helmer's mood and that of Nora.

RANK [*outside*]. It is I. May I come in for a moment?

HEL. [*in a fretful whisper*]. Oh, what does he want now?
[*Aloud.*] Wait a minute? [*Unlocks the door.*] Come, that's kind of you not to pass by our door.

⁽¹⁸⁾RANK. I thought I heard your voice, and I felt as if I should like to look in. [*With a swift glance round.*] Ah, yes!—these dear familiar rooms. You are very happy and cosy in here, you two.

HEL. It seems to me that you looked after yourself pretty well upstairs too.

RANK. Excellently. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world?—at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can. The wine was capital—

HEL. Especially the champagne.

RANK. So you noticed that too? It is almost incredible how much I managed to put away!

NORA. Torvald drank a great deal of champagne tonight, too.

RANK. Did he?

NORA. Yes, and he is always in such good spirits afterwards.

RANK. Well, why should one not enjoy a merry evening after a well-spent day?

HEL. Well spent? I am afraid I can't take credit for that.

RANK [*clapping him on the back*]. But I can, you know!

NORA. Doctor Rank, you must have been occupied with some scientific investigation today.

RANK. Exactly.

HEL. Just listen!—little Nora talking about scientific investigations!

NORA. And may I congratulate you on the result?

RANK. Indeed you may.

NORA. Was it favorable, then?

RANK. The best possible, for both doctor and patient—certainty.

NORA [*quickly and searchingly*]. Certainty?

RANK. Absolute certainty. So wasn't I entitled to make a merry evening of it after that?

(18) Dr. Rank's entrance is well explained in the light of what the audience learns a little later—that this is his last call. His mood of exhilaration both prepares a dramatic contrast for the final announcement with the cards, and is psychologically convincing when the truth is known. The remarks exchanged between Dr. Rank and Nora prepare the audience for Dr. Rank's end, and introduce irony in Helmer's obliviousness to their significance. It is exactly in accord with Dr. Rank's character that he should desire this last sense of intimacy with Nora in their shared understanding that this is farewell, while maintaining his stoicism in no open reference to the reason for his call.

NORA. Yes, you certainly were, Doctor Rank.

HEL. I think so too, so long as you don't have to pay for it in the morning.

RANK. Oh, well, one can't have anything in this life without paying for it.

NORA. Doctor Rank—are you fond of fancy-dress balls?

RANK. Yes, if there is a fine lot of pretty costumes.

NORA. Tell me—what shall we two wear at the next?

HEL. Little featherbrain!—are you thinking of the next already?

RANK. We two? Yes, I can tell you. You shall go as a good fairy—

HEL. Yes, but what do you suggest as an appropriate costume for that?

RANK. Let your wife go dressed just as she is in everyday life.

HEL. That was really very prettily turned. But can't you tell us what you will be?

RANK. Yes, my dear friend, I have quite made up my mind about that.

HEL. Well?

RANK. At the next fancy-dress ball I shall be invisible.

HEL. That's a good joke!

RANK. There is a big black hat—have you ever heard of hats that make you invisible? If you put one on, no one can see you.

HEL. [*suppressing a smile*]. Yes, you are quite right.⁽¹⁸⁾

RANK. But I am clean forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar—one of the dark Havanas.

HEL. With the greatest pleasure. [*Offers him his case.*]

RANK [*takes a cigar and cuts off the end*]. Thanks.

⁽¹⁹⁾NORA [*striking a match*]. Let me give you a light.

RANK. Thank you. [*She holds the match for him to light his cigar.*] And now good-bye!

HEL. Good-bye, good-bye, dear old man!

NORA. Sleep well, Doctor Rank.

RANK. Thank you for that wish.

NORA. Wish me the same.

RANK. You? Well, if you want me to sleep well! And

(19) Dr. Rank's scene builds up the crucial suspense by holding the situation poised a little longer. It makes possible the introduction of the farewell cards and elimination of Dr. Rank from Nora's and Helmer's lives within the act, and accents Nora's position by the degree of parallel in that of Dr. Rank.

thanks for the light. [*He nods to them both and goes out.*]⁽¹⁹⁾

HEL. [*in a subdued voice*]. He has drunk more than he ought.

NORA [*absently*]. Maybe. ⁽²⁰⁾ [*HELMER takes a bunch of keys out of his pocket and goes into the hall.*] Torvald! what are you going to do there?

HEL. Empty the letter-box; it is quite full; there will be no room to put the newspaper in tomorrow morning.⁽²⁰⁾

NORA. Are you going to work tonight?

HEL. You know quite well I'm not. What is this? Someone has been at the lock.

NORA. At the lock—?

HEL. Yes, someone has. What can it mean? I should never have thought the maid—. Here is a broken hairpin. Nora, it is one of yours.

NORA [*quickly*]. Then it must have been the children—

HEL. Then you must get them out of those ways. There, at last I have got it open. ⁽²¹⁾ [*Takes out the contents of the letter-box, and calls to the kitchen.*] Helen!—Helen, put out the light over the front door.⁽²¹⁾ [*Goes back into the room and shuts the door into the hall. He holds out his hand full of letters.*] Look at that—look what a heap of them there are. [*Turning them over.*] What on earth is that?

NORA [*at the window*]. The letter— No! Torvald, no!

HEL. Two cards—of Rank's.

NORA. Of Doctor Rank's?

HEL. [*looking at them*]. Doctor Rank. They were on the top. He must have put them in when he went out.

NORA. Is there anything written on them?

HEL. There is a black cross over the name. Look there—what an uncomfortable idea! It looks as if he were announcing his own death.

NORA. It is just what he is doing.

HEL. What? Do you know anything about it? Has he said anything to you?

NORA. Yes. He told me that when the cards came it would be his leave-taking from us. He means to shut himself up and die.

(20) Beginning of the final rise to the crisis, which is delayed and suspense intensified by the hairpin incident, one more pathetic little attempt on Nora's part to avert disaster, and the incident of Dr. Rank's cards.

(21) Helmer's unconsciousness of what is impending, with the letter in his hand, is emphasized by his attention to a detail of domestic routine.

HEL. My poor old friend. Certainly I knew we should not have him very long with us. But so soon! And so he hides himself away like a wounded animal.

⁽²²⁾NORA. If it has to happen, it is best it should be without a word—don't you think so, Torvald?⁽²²⁾

⁽²³⁾HEL. [*walking up and down*]. He had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness. Well, perhaps it is best so. For him, anyway. [*Standing still*]. And perhaps for us too, Nora. We two are thrown quite upon each other now.⁽²³⁾ [*Puts his arms round her*]. My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. ⁽²⁴⁾Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake.⁽²⁴⁾

⁽²⁵⁾NORA [*disengages herself, and says firmly and decidedly*]. Now you must read your letters, Torvald.⁽²⁵⁾

HEL. No, no; not tonight. I want to be with you, my darling wife.

NORA. With the thought of your friend's death—

HEL. You are right, it has affected us both. Something ugly has come between us—the thought of the horrors of death. We must try and rid our minds of that. Until then—we will each go to our own room.

NORA [*hanging on his neck*]. Good-night, Torvald—Good-night!

HEL. [*kissing her on the forehead*]. Good-night, my little singing-bird. Sleep sound, Nora. Now I will read my letters through. [*He takes his letters and goes into his room, shutting the door after him*].

⁽²⁶⁾NORA [*gropes distractedly about, seizes HELMER's domino, throws it about her, while she says in quick, hoarse, spasmodic whispers*]. Never to see him again. Never! Never! [*Puts her shawl over her head*]. Never to see my children again either—never again. Never! Never!—Ah! the icy, black water—the unfathomable depths— If only it were over! He has got it now—now he is reading it. Good-bye, Torvald and my children! [*She is about to rush out through the hall,*

(22) Prepares for Nora's own intention of leaving without a word.

(23) Ibsen continues to prepare for Helmer's self-centeredness in relation to Nora by having him casually reveal self-centeredness in other relations.

(24) A savage thrust of irony before the crisis.

(25) The exact moment of the crisis is not forced upon Nora against vain struggling on her part, but comes by her own decision, which prepares for her firmness of character after the crisis.

(26) An interval both for suspense, and to give Helmer time to read the letter.

when HELMER opens his door hurriedly and stands with an open letter in his hand.]⁽²⁶⁾

HEL. Nora!

NORA. Ah!—

HEL. What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

NORA. Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me get out!

HEL. [*holding her back*]. Where are you going?

⁽²⁷⁾NORA [*trying to get free*]. You shan't save me, Torvald!

⁽²⁸⁾HEL. [*reeling*]. True? Is this true, that I read here? Horrible! No, no—it is impossible that it is true.

NORA. It is true. I have loved you above everything else in the world.

HEL. Oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.

NORA [*taking a step towards him*]. Torvald—!

HEL. Miserable creature—what have you done?

NORA. Let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself.

HEL. No tragedy airs, please. [*Locks the hall door.*] Here you shall stay and give me an explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me? Do you understand what you have done?

NORA [*looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face*]. Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly.⁽²⁸⁾

HEL. [*walking about the room*]. What a horrible awakening! All these eight years—she who was my joy and pride—a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal! ⁽²⁹⁾The unutterable ugliness of it all!—For shame! For shame!⁽²⁹⁾ [*NORA is silent and looks steadily at him. He stops in front of her.*] ⁽³⁰⁾I ought to have suspected that something of the sort would happen. I ought to have foreseen it. All your father's want of principle—be silent—all your father's want of principle has come out in you.⁽³⁰⁾ ⁽³¹⁾No religion, no morality, no sense of duty—. ⁽³¹⁾How I am punished for having winked at what he did! I did it for your sake, and this is how you repay me.

NORA. Yes, that's just it.

(27) Nora's mind is so possessed by her faith in Helmer's love and capacity to sacrifice for her, her expectation of "the wonderful thing," that she is blind to his manner, and even to his words through his next two speeches; then the perception comes.

(28) *The crisis of the play.* In the conflict precipitated by Krogstad, Nora's effort has been to avert revelation of the forgery. When the revelation became inevitable, on the basis of her belief as to Helmer's character and relation to her, she fought through to decision as to what she would do. With the revelation of the forgery, comes an unforeseen development, revelation of an entirely different character and relation to her in Helmer than she had expected. Her former decision is no longer a solution; she is confronted with the necessity of a new and final decision. The major dramatic question goes through three phases for the audience: Will revelation of the forgery be averted? What will happen when it is revealed? What will the effect be on Nora of the revelation of Helmer's character and what will she do?

(29) The contrast between Helmer's and Nora's sense of what is beautiful.

(30) The idea of heredity prepared for earlier gives Helmer an extra bitter thrust at the crisis.

(31) Prepares for the elaboration on these themes later.

⁽⁸²⁾HEL. Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases—I dare not refuse. And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman!⁽⁸²⁾

NORA. When I am out of the way, you will be free.

HEL. No fine speeches, please. Your father had always plenty of those ready too. What good would it be to me if you were out of the way, as you say? Not the slightest.⁽⁸³⁾ He can make the affair known everywhere; and if he does, I may be falsely suspected of having been a party to your criminal action. Very likely people will think I was behind it all—that it was I who prompted you!⁽⁸³⁾ And I have to thank you for all this—you whom I have cherished during the whole of our married life.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?⁽⁸⁴⁾

NORA [*coldly and quietly*]. Yes.

HEL. It is so incredible that I can't take it in. But we must come to some understanding. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I tell you. I must try and appease him in some way or another.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The matter must be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before—but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you. To think that I should be obliged to say so to one whom I have loved so dearly, and whom I still—. No, that is all over. From this moment happiness is not the question; all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance—⁽⁸⁵⁾

⁽⁸⁶⁾[*A ring is heard at the front-door bell.*]

HEL. [*with a start*]. What is that? So late! Can the worst— Can he—? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you are ill.

[*NORA stands motionless. HELMER goes and unlocks the hall door.*]

MAID [*half dressed comes to the door*]. A letter for the mistress.

(32) Helmer's self-centeredness and his cowardice, emphasized and reemphasized from here on.

(33) Ironic contrast to Nora's belief that exactly what Helmer would want to do would be to assume the responsibility in order to shield her.

(34) Ironic contrast again to Nora's consciousness that she had loved Helmer above everything else in the world, and had saved his life.

(35) Helmer's sense for appearance above actuality.

(36) The complication of the letter introduces a dramatic reversal for Helmer, and with Helmer's reaction to it, clears the ground for Nora's final decision and the movement to the resolution. The letter gives Helmer one last chance to show some thought for Nora, and what follows is his most absolute expression of self-centeredness, "I am saved."

HEL. Give it to me. [*Takes the letter, and shuts the door*]. Yes, it is from him. You shall not have it; I will read it myself.

NORA. Yes, read it.

HEL. [*standing by the lamp*]. I scarcely have the courage to do it. It may mean ruin for the both of us. No, I must know. [*Tears open the letter, runs his eye over a few lines, looks at a paper enclosed, and gives a shout of joy.*] Nora! [*She looks at him questioningly.*] Nora!—No, I must read it once again—. Yes, it is true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!⁽⁸⁶⁾

NORA. And I?

HEL. You too, of course; we are both saved, both you and I. Look, he sends you your bond back. He says he regrets and repents—that a happy change in his life—never mind what he says! We are saved, Nora! No one can do anything to you. Oh, Nora, Nora;—no, first I must destroy these hateful things. Let me see—. [*Takes a look at the bond.*] No, no, I won't look at it. The whole thing shall be nothing but a bad dream to me. [*Tears up the bond and both letters, throws them all into the stove and watches them burn.*] There—now it doesn't exist any longer. He says that since Christmas Eve you—. These must have been three dreadful days for you, Nora.

NORA. I have fought a hard fight these three days.

⁽⁸⁷⁾HEL. And suffered agonies, and seen no way out but—. No, we won't call any of the horrors to mind. We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, "It's all over! It's all over!" Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realize that it is all over. What is this?—such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.⁽⁸⁷⁾

NORA. That is true.

HEL. You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the

(37) Dramatic contrast is built up in Helmer's complete unconsciousness of what is to come, and the bitterest kind of irony in his immediate reversion to smug superiority and the strong man and helpless woman version of his and Nora's relation.

less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes. You must not think any more about the hard things I said in my first moment of consternation, when I thought everything was going to overwhelm me. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you.

NORA. Thank you for your forgiveness. [*She goes out through the door to the right.*]

HEL. No, don't go—. [*Looks in.*] What are you doing in there?

⁽³⁸⁾NORA [*from within*]. Taking off my fancy dress.⁽³⁸⁾

HEL. [*standing at the open door*]. Yes, do. Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. [*Walks up and down by the door.*] How warm and cosy our home is, Nora. Here is shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart. It will come, little by little, Nora, believe me. Tomorrow morning you will look upon it all quite differently; soon everything will be just as it was before. Very soon you won't need me to assure you that I have forgiven you; you will yourself feel the certainty that I have done so. Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching you? You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her freely and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it were, doubly his own; he has given her a new life so to speak; and she has in a way become both wife and child to him. So you shall be for me after this, my little scared helpless darling. Have no anxiety about anything, Nora; only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you— What is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

(38) Bitter symbolism intended by Nora, and naturally introduced.

NORA [*in everyday dress*]. Yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

HEL. But what for?—so late as this.

NORA. I shall not sleep tonight.

HEL. But my dear Nora—

⁽⁸⁹⁾NORA [*looking at her watch*]. It is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another. [*She sits down at one side of the table.*]

HEL. Nora—what is this?—this cold, set face?

NORA. Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

HEL. [*sits down at the opposite side of the table*]. You alarm me, Nora!—and I don't understand you.

NORA. No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either—before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.⁽⁸⁹⁾

HEL. What do you mean by that?

NORA [*after a short silence*]. Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

HEL. What is that?

NORA. We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation.

HEL. What do you mean serious?

NORA. In all these eight years—longer than that—from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on any serious subject.

HEL. Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

NORA. I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

HEL. But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

NORA. That is just it; you have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald—first by papa and then by you.

(39) The final movement of *A Doll's House* is without physical activity on the stage, and is a good example of what is meant by dramatic action as distinguished from physical movement. For the long concluding scene of *A Doll's House*, a man and woman sit quietly across the table from each other with their minds meeting in conflict, and the scene is the most tense part of the play. The minds meeting in conflict would give us an argument instead of a dramatic action were the emotions of the principals not engaged and their fates at stake. The argument is a dramatic action because it is a movement toward an outcome in Nora's and Helmer's lives: Nora leaves her husband. My own judgment, however, is that, in spite of Ibsen's principle of subordination of theme to characterization, something of truth to character is sacrificed here to the necessity of clarity of the ideology for the audience. Nora is somewhat too articulate for her previous background of undeveloped thought, and so promptly after being confronted with a totally unexpected and overwhelming situation. In the present day the motivation of Nora's final act could be conveyed with equal clarity and greater dramatic effectiveness in part by suggestion. In Ibsen's time, when the ideas were more revolutionary, the fuller exposition was probably needed.

It should be noted that much antecedent material is introduced in this last movement of the play, each item acting as a force in the conflict.

HEL. What! By us two—by us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in the world?

NORA [*shaking her head*]. You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

HEL. Nora, what do I hear you saying?

NORA. It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you—

HEL. What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

NORA [*undisturbed*]. I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands to yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you—or else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which—I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman—just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

HEL. How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

NORA. No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

⁽⁴⁰⁾HEL. Not—not happy!

NORA. No, only merry.⁽⁴⁰⁾ And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.

HEL. There is some truth in what you say—exaggerated and strained as your view of it is. But for the future it shall

(40) A nice distinction, and in retrospect, an accurate characterization of the opening mood of the play.

be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.

NORA. Whose lessons? Mine or the children's?

HEL. Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora.

⁽⁴¹⁾NORA. Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.⁽⁴¹⁾

HEL. And you can say that!

NORA. And I—how am I fitted to bring up the children?

HEL. Nora!

NORA. Didn't you say so yourself a little while ago—that you dare not trust me to bring them up?

HEL. In a moment of anger! Why do you pay any heed to that?

NORA. Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself—you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself.⁽⁴²⁾ And that is why I am going to leave you now.⁽⁴²⁾

HEL. [*springing up*]. What do you say?

⁽⁴³⁾NORA. I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me.⁽⁴³⁾ It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

HEL. Nora, Nora!

NORA. I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night—

HEL. You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

NORA. It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

HEL. What sort of madness is this!

NORA. Tomorrow I shall go home—I mean, to my old home. It will be easiest for me to find something to do there.

HEL. You blind, foolish woman!

NORA. I must try and get some sense, Torvald.

HEL. To desert your home, your husband and your children! ⁽⁴⁴⁾And you don't consider what people will say!

(41) After the appearance of *A Doll's House* there was a furore of indignation against Ibsen as striking at the sanctity of marriage and the home. Ibsen's avoidance of undue generalizations and care to create drama of individuals is apparent here. Ibsen believed that in many marriages, as the relations of men and women conventionally existed in his day, the woman was sinned against in the manner described by Nora; but it was not because of the marriage relation as such, but because of the kind of man Helmer was revealed as being at the crisis, that Nora felt compelled to leave her husband. It was the revelation of the real nature of Helmer's feeling toward her brought about by the crisis which awakened Nora to the nature of their past relations; but with another man, in another way, there might have come a gentler awakening from which husband and wife could have worked out the problem together.

(42) A complication in the movement toward the resolution.

(43) A favorite idea with Ibsen, the necessity of individual choice of values. Nora could not remain with Helmer because he was not a man with whom her mind and will could ever stand alone.

(44) Helmer's characteristic first concern for appearances, a part of the social hypocrisy which Ibsen fiercely criticized.

NORA. I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.⁽⁴⁴⁾

HEL. It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

NORA. What do you consider my most sacred duties?

HEL. Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

NORA. I have other duties just as sacred.

HEL. That you have not. What duties could those be?

NORA. Duties to myself.

⁽⁴⁵⁾HEL. Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

NORA. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events, that I must try and become one.⁽⁴⁵⁾ I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

HEL. Can you understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?—have you no religion?

NORA. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

HEL. What are you saying?

NORA. I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

HEL. This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or—answer me—am I to think you have none?

NORA. I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite an-

(45) One after another, duty, religion, morality, and law are subordinated to this single principle, as subject to rational judgment by and for the individual. One of the endearing elements in Nora's characterization appears throughout this scene, a kind of humility. She is conscious of ignorance, and passes no judgments except one, that her first responsibility is to herself, to become capable of judgment.

other thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

HEL. You talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

NORA. No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

HEL. You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost think you are out of your mind.

NORA. I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

HEL. And is it with a clear and certain mind that you forsake your husband and your children?

NORA. Yes, it is.

HEL. Then there is only one possible explanation.

NORA. What is that?

⁽⁴⁶⁾HEL. You do not love me any more.

NORA. No, that is just it.

HEL. Nora!—and you can say that?

NORA. It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it. I do not love you any more.⁽⁴⁶⁾

HEL. [*regaining his composure*]. Is that a clear and certain conviction too?

NORA. Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

HEL. And can you tell me what I have done to forfeit your love?

NORA. Yes, indeed I can. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen; then I saw you were not the man I had thought you.

HEL. Explain yourself better—I don't understand you.

⁽⁴⁷⁾NORA. I have waited so patiently for eight years; for, goodness knows I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day. Then this horrible misfortune came upon me; and then I felt quite certain that the wonderful thing was going to happen at last. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that

(46) A further complication propelling the action toward the resolution.

(47) Anticipation in Nora's veiled allusions has been built up for this full exposition of "the wonderful thing" she expected, which is the heart of the play. When the crisis of Helmer's illness arose Nora offered the utmost in her power, and for eight years of strain and anxiety she has put into life pure love and devotion. She herself has realized that nothing in Helmer's life toward her has been an equal manifestation of love, but she has cherished the faith that the deep love was there, and has hoped some day to experience some full expression of it. Keeping her secret completely to herself, out of love for Helmer, she has experienced a sense of loneliness. All persons whose relation to life is wholehearted feel a yearning for a sense of harmony and unity between themselves and the life to which they give themselves. Nora had given fully to life of love, and the wonderful thing she looked for was an equal manifestation of love in return. When the occasion for it came, it was in a terrible form which love would not permit her to accept; but there was a joy in the thought that it would be offered. The parallel and contrast to another of Ibsen's characters, Hedda Gabler, is significant. Hedda also desired a manifestation of beauty from life, but she had given nothing to life herself by which to deserve it, and there is no real content to her idea of beauty, as for Nora beauty was love; the act of beauty she desires is only an empty gesture. Hedda tries to wring an act of beauty from life. Nora waits patiently for eight years, for she "knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day." That modesty of Nora's demand upon life contributes one of her most lovable and sympathetic moments to the play.

you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done—

HEL. Yes, what then?—when I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

NORA. When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

HEL. Nora—!

NORA. You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. But what would my assurances have been worth against yours? That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.⁽⁴⁷⁾

⁽⁴⁸⁾HEL. I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora—bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves.

NORA. It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.⁽⁴⁸⁾

HEL. Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.

⁽⁴⁹⁾NORA. Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over—and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you—when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in the future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile.⁽⁴⁹⁾ [*Getting up.*] ⁽⁵⁰⁾Torvald—it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man and had borne him three children—. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!⁽⁵⁰⁾

HEL. [*sadly*]. I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us—there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

NORA. As I am now, I am no wife for you.

⁽⁵¹⁾HEL. I have it in me to become a different man.

NORA. Perhaps—if your doll is taken away from you.⁽⁵¹⁾

(48) Ibsen rather overstrains his idea here of a contrast between the masculine and feminine points of view. Countless men have sacrificed every integrity of principle, character, and personality to provide the better for the ones they love.

(49) Helmer's responses to the situation which has just passed are pointed for the audience in this precise analysis.

(50) A further complication propelling toward the resolution, and injecting a rising degree of emotion into the scene which is needed so near the resolution. From here on the tempo is accelerated in shorter speeches, more rapid exchange of ideas, and swifter emotional responses.

(51) Prepares for the further suggestion of change in Helmer at the end.

HEL. But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

NORA [*going out to the right*]. That makes it all the more certain that it must be done. ⁽⁵²⁾ [*She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag which she puts on a chair by the table.*]

HEL. Nora. Nora, not now! Wait till tomorrow.

NORA [*putting on her cloak*]. I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room.

HEL. But can't we live here like brother and sister—?

NORA [*putting on her hat*]. You know very well that would not last long. [*Puts the shawl round her.*] Good-bye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

HEL. But some day, Nora—some day?

NORA. How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

HEL. But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

NORA. Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

HEL. That too?

NORA. That too.

HEL. Here it is.

NORA. That's right. Now it is all over.⁽⁵²⁾ I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house—better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

HEL. All over! All over!—Nora, shall you never think of me again?

NORA. I know I shall often think of you and the children and this house.

(52). The stage-business of Nora's putting on her cloak and hat and shawl, and the return of rings prepares for the finality of the curtain, and introduces a desirable element of physical activity as theatre.

HEL. May I write to you, Nora?

NORA. No—never. You must not do that.

HEL. But at least let me send you—

NORA. Nothing—nothing—

HEL. Let me help you if you are in want.

NORA. No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

⁽⁵⁸⁾HEL. Nora—can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA [*taking her bag*]. Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HEL. Tell me what that would be!

NORA. Both you and I would have to be so changed that—. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

HEL. But I will believe in it. Tell me? So changed that—?

NORA. That our life together would be a real wedlock. Good-bye. [*She goes out through the hall.*]

HEL. [*sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands*]. Nora! Nora! [*Looks round, and rises.*] Empty. She is gone. [*A hope flashes across his mind.*] The most wonderful thing of all—?

[*The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.*]

(53) *The resolution of the play* is accomplished when Nora says "Good-bye." Ibsen introduces a note of hope at the end of the play. Nora feels it for a moment, and then in weariness and disillusion after holding up so bravely through the scene, she can only say, "Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening." Her last few speeches reveal her emotion at parting and the depth of the love she has felt for Helmer. When Helmer says eagerly, "But I will believe in it. Tell me?" one feels this is no longer his false air of superiority asserting itself, but a hint of fresh strength which may grow in him out of suffering. That he welcomes the idea of change in himself shows a change has already begun. The hope for the future is emphasized by Helmer's last words after Nora is gone, "The most wonderful thing of all—?" Helmer as well as Nora needs to stand alone for realization of his character. Helmer's self-centeredness is given such extreme emphasis at the crisis, for dramatic intensification and justification of Nora's decision, that the suggestion at the end is highly desirable to round out the reality of the character. The ending of the play suggests a new play but does not interfere with the completeness and finality of the action. When the sound of the door shutting is heard, one phase of the lives of Nora and Helmer has closed.

It is possible that some confusion may arise for those who have seen the recent production of *A Doll's House* by Jed Harris with a new adaptation by Thornton Wilder for script. Mr. Wilder omitted from his script Helmer's final words after his cry of "Nora!" The stage manager made a further cut of the lines between, "I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening" ("But I no longer believe in miracles," in Mr. Wilder's version), and Nora's "Good-bye." The aim, of course, in both Mr. Wilder's and the production cuts was to get a sharper, quicker curtain. As a result, the suggestion of change in Helmer is practically eliminated and "the most wonderful thing of all" left unexplained and

hanging in the air. Mr. Wilder in his version kept close to earlier translations on the whole, but gave the dialogue a more modern colloquial tone and quicker movement which was very effective in the theatre, a real improvement for modern production on earlier translations. The ending as it appeared in production, however, represents too great a zeal for the idea of "theatre" over content of character and ideas. The emphasis was thrown on Helmer's emotion of sense of loss and emptiness, and he has been too unsympathetic a character for the audience to be primarily concerned in his emotion without the suggestion of change which associates him more closely with Nora. There was a straining for an immediate effect at the curtain which did not grow out of what preceded, and was, therefore, sentimental. My impression was that the curtain fell a little flat with the audience.

There is another possible source of confusion in the widely familiar translation of *A Doll's House* by William Archer which appears in the edition of Ibsen's complete works in English. Mr. Archer translated "miracle" throughout in place of "a wonderful thing," and "the miracle of miracles" for "the most wonderful thing of all." The translation is unjustified, as the word in the original is *vidunderlige*, which is literally "a wonderful thing" in English, while *mirakel* in Ibsen's Dano-Norwegian would be "miracle." The effect is very different: a miracle is something outside the course of nature, an act of special dispensation; the word has neither the idea of beauty in it, nor the humility, which belong to "the wonderful thing" as Nora thought of it. That Ibsen was sharply aware of the distinction is evident from an earlier version of *A Doll's House* preserved in his *Efterladte Skrifter* ("Literary Remains," entitled *Ibsen's Workshop* in the English edition of his complete works). There, Nora says *vidunderligste* (superlative form) for "the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen," and changes to *mirakler* for "I no longer believe in miracles." In other words, in her disillusion and despair, a wonderful thing has become a miracle to her mind, something that really can't happen. In his final draft of *A Doll's House*, Ibsen elaborated the idea of "the wonderful thing," and the suggestion of hope for the

future at the end, and changed *mirakler* to *vidunderligt*. The translation of *A Doll's House* by R. Farquharson Sharp which appears here is accurate. Unfortunately Mr. Wilder, apparently to avoid so many repetitions of one phrase, has blurred Ibsen's fine shading of Nora's characterization and his theme by mixing Archer's and Sharp's translations, sometimes having Nora say "wonderful thing" and sometimes "miracle."

We have now analyzed three plays minutely, and less detailed discussion of a number of others will follow. Such study has four purposes: to make concrete the abstract principles of drama, to acquire a store of dramatic devices upon which to draw for the needs presented by one's own material, to develop initiative for original and logical solution of new problems as they arise, and to cultivate the habit of thinking dramatically.

The principles of dramatic writing are concrete in origin; they have been drawn from what has been done in the theatre. Only by studying them at work in plays can they become a living actuality, an active and guiding part of the mind of the person who is undertaking a play.

The problem of one drama is never identical with that of another, but many situations are parallel in some of their aspects. The methods used by one dramatist may be adapted to the purpose of another. The body of dramas that have been written are a heritage available to those who come after. By study of what other men have done, the inexperienced dramatist acquires a storehouse of dramatic device from which to draw at need. No drama has come into being full-blown. Greek tragedy evolved from the choral ceremonies of the Dionysiac rites, and was primitive at first; medieval drama evolved from antiphonal responses in the Catholic liturgy; the earliest Elizabethan dramas were crude, barely a foreshadowing of Shakespeare. Shakespeare used and transformed the work of his predecessors and contemporaries, as did Ibsen. The evolution of drama prepares the way for the great geniuses, and they become masters for those who follow.

Such study, if vigorous in application, does not lead to imitation. In fact, the imitative dramatist is the one who has not studied intensively enough. No one ever can write a play without knowing some other plays. If he knows them only superficially, he will follow them superficially. From thorough study he penetrates to the principle of logical relation between the material and the problem and the solution. He sees that each development in a good play is to a degree original, an organic growth from character and situation. Such knowledge is both a stimulus and a guide to one's own initiative.

Above all, from the study of drama, the person writing a play learns to think dramatically. Drama is an organization of those elements in life which can be presented upon a stage. Just as the painter walking down a street will involuntarily rearrange and frame in his mind what he sees into the compositions of line, mass, and color appropriate to his art, the dramatist habitually sees the conflicts in life and how their significance may be revealed by the tension of complications ordered into a unified movement from attack through crisis to resolution, and how that movement may be arranged for presentation on a stage. Contact with drama both develops the perception for the dramatic elements in life, and prepares the mind with a ready response of technical equipment for its organization. Anyone who would write plays should take advantage of every opportunity for association with drama, by taking part in amateur production, by seeing plays, and by reading, and all analytically, until thinking dramatically becomes the habit of his mind.

XI. BEFORE AND AFTER THE FIRST DRAFT: SCENARIOS AND REVISIONS

IBSEN in his later years was frequently applied to by young dramatists for advice on their plays. He would talk to no one unless the visitor presented a full scenario. He considered that without a scenario they were both wasting time, and that he might reasonably expect a novice to do as much as he himself did in preparation for writing a play. Many people approaching their first play experience a reluctance toward scenario writing. They are eager to get at the play itself. That is sometimes possible on a one-act play, because for the short unit the scenario may be carried in the head. There are very few people who will not do better to put the scenario, even for a one-act play, in writing. For a long play a written scenario is indispensable. The fact that Maxwell Anderson, for instance, is reported to put nothing on paper before he actually writes the play is so exceptional as not to count for anyone else. Such a practice does not imply more or less genius, but a very special kind of memory as a highly individual attribute of Mr. Anderson's genius. If someone else happens to have the same kind of memory, probably no pressure on earth would make him write scenarios, so no damage is done if it is set down as a hard and fast rule that everyone must write a scenario. Construction is so important in drama, and so complicated in a long play, that the only way to get it right is to strip it bare and look at it. Deformities can be seen then and corrected before they affect the vital functioning of the play. The hard disciplined thinking required in the perfecting of a scenario may check the fine glow of inspiration for a time, but no disturbance need be felt on that account. The conception matures during the period of concentration for the scenario, and if

the inspiration was a valid one it will return and be the stronger for the solid foundation.

The word scenario often seems to frighten people. They imagine it as something very technical and elaborately formal. A scenario is simply an outline of the play, and differs from any other outline only in the basis of division, which is acts, scenes, and entrances and exits, in recognition of the adjustment of the form of a play to the stage.

The exact form of the scenario and its fullness may vary for different people. Each dramatist discovers by practice what is adjusted to his own mind. There are two essential functions for the scenario—that it shall show the structure of complications, and that it shall show the organization of the material into form for the stage, the act and scene divisions, with the entrances and exits. In French and German printing practice, the use of the word "scene" is different from that with which we are familiar in English. We are accustomed to "scene" applied in the printing of plays only to the units of action between curtains. The curtain rises on Scene I; if there are curtain breaks within the act, the second rise of the curtain introduces Scene II, and so on. In French and German printing, every entrance or exit of a character which is not merely introductory or transitional to forming a new group on the stage is marked as a scene division. In *A Doll's House*, for example, although there is no break in time or place in the first act, Scene I would appear in the middle of the page under Act I, and Scene II at Mrs. Linde's entrance; probably Scene III even for Krogstad's first brief appearance, and Scene IV at his exit; Scene V at Dr. Rank's entrance, and so on. There would be no scene division for the period that Nora is on the stage at the opening before Helmer's entrance, as that is introductory to bringing Nora and Helmer together on the stage as a dramatic group; and there would be no scene divisions for the entrances and exits of the servants who announce Mrs. Linde and Krogstad. This kind of scene division in the publication of plays is an interruption and distraction for reading, but it represents a sound principle of dramatic construction which is most useful in scenario writing.

Every time the group on the stage changes, the dramatic potentiality changes. There is action between A and B; A and B must both be on the stage. Then there is action between A and C. Possibly C cannot say what he has to say to A in the presence of B; B must be got off the stage, and A and C left as a new dramatic group. That principle furnishes the basis of form for the final scenario. Preliminary scenarios are nearly always useful. First the dramatist writes a summary of his story. Often accompanying this summary are descriptions and analyses of the characters. What a character is determines what he can do in the play. Possibly there will be an analysis of the theme, what the dramatist intends to reveal through the action. Then the dramatist writes an outline of the basic structure, what the attack, crisis, and resolution, and the principal complications will be. Next he determines what incidents must be on the stage and how to get them there; that is, he blocks out the units of continuous action on the stage, the act and scene divisions. Then he is ready for the final scenario, which will show every grouping on the stage, every entrance and exit, and every move in the action.

The formal aspect of the scenario is for the purpose of making the structure of the play readily apparent to the eye. The character groups on the stage give the basis of division. A form that has been found helpful is to write the names of the characters on-stage in the middle of the page. Under the names as a heading state what is to be accomplished in that scene, as details of exposition, details of characterization, preparation for something later in the play, and primarily, of course, advance in the action. Nora's first scene with Helmer in Act II of *A Doll's House*, for example, closes one way by which she tries to prevent the revelation of the forgery, her scene with Dr. Rank another; her scene with Mrs. Linde introduces a new possible escape; her Tarantella scene with Helmer and Dr. Rank keeps Helmer from looking at his mail until Mrs. Linde shall have time to see Krogstad and return, and so on. Following the analysis of the functions of the scene, with an extra space left for the sake of the eye, summarize what happens in the scene, that

is, the action and dialogue by which the functions are accomplished. Then when a principal character enters or leaves, write the new character group in the middle of the page, and proceed as before. In this way the play is blocked off into its basic units of composition, giving the author a clear conception of what happens in each, and its function. The scenes of a long play written over a considerable period of time are not necessarily written consecutively. One may feel set just right to do one of the later scenes before the early part of the play is written. With a good scenario as background, the scene can be written at the time when the author's mood is right for it without leading to confusion. Some revisions may be required from the later development of details of the preceding scenes, but the author may have put a quality into its original writing that would never have been recaptured.

With the play divided into its functional character groups on the stage, the scenario may be helpfully elaborated by stating for each entrance and exit how the character is brought on or taken off the stage. Sometimes the statement of this process falls naturally into the summary of what happens in the scene, but sometimes a separate statement is desirable, and sometimes a summary of a transitional scene will need to be written in between the dramatically functional scenes. The division into scenes by character groups, their functioning, and the technique of entrances and exits may be studied conveniently in *A Doll's House* with the aid of the accompanying analysis in the preceding chapter.

Some people find it helpful to arrange the scenario in a two-column form, with the summaries of what happens running in one column, and the analyses of function in the other. Some put the list of the characters on-stage for a scene in a wide margin instead of the middle of the page. Such matters are entirely individual. Everyone in the course of experience will work out the details for his own type of scenario.

There are at least four good reasons for a well-prepared scenario. It enforces thorough thinking through of every problem of the play; the analysis of the functions of the

scenes is an especially useful discipline. The period of thought spent on the scenario brings the characters more fully to life in the imagination; people who try to dispense with a scenario usually begin to write too soon, before they have lived long enough with the characters and know them thoroughly enough. The scenario puts whatever may be wrong with the construction of the play clearly before the author before he has expended energy and time on the wrong track, embedded the error in a mass of obscuring detail, and given it the solidity of final imaginative creation which is so difficult to unseat; it is immensely easier and more effective to revise in scenario than in full draft. Finally, the scenario gets so much of the mechanics of the play settled that the imagination is released for the actual writing. It is almost inevitable that the process of achieving a really detailed scenario will call many bits of dialogue into mind. These should be written down, as they come, either incorporated into the scenario or on separate sheets. The person working on a first play is likely to be surprised to find how nearly his play is written by the time he has completed his scenario.

There is an old saying that plays are not written but rewritten. That would be less true if enough rewriting were done in scenario. There is a temptation to let something slide in the scenario in the vague hope that somehow it will come out all right when it is written up. It almost never does. One must be rigid with oneself and not evade what the scenario reveals. If there is the slightest question or feeling of discomfort about anything in the scenario, that is the place to work on it until it gives absolute confidence. That is what the scenario is for. After revision has been carried to the limit in the scenario, there will probably be enough rewriting to do after the first draft for the old saying to seem true.

It is seldom that some departures from the scenario are not made in the actual writing of the play. If after the departure the progression swings pretty promptly back into line with the scenario, that is all right, but if the change establishes a new track, the writer should stop and go back to scenario revision or he will find himself writing a play

without benefit of scenario after all. It is to be expected that there will often be some such working back and forth between the writing of the play and the scenario. The characters come to life in the play and suggest new developments, and as the mind of the dramatist penetrates more deeply into his subject his own thinking develops. The creation of a work of art is not simply copying onto paper, or canvas, something which already exists complete and whole in the mind of the artist; it is a way of thinking. Keats wrote of *Endymion* to his friend and publisher, John Taylor: "When I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth."

After the first draft is finished, the author must endeavor to look at it as objectively as he can, and bring to bear upon it for criticism all that he knows of construction, characterization and dialogue. The writing of a good play and the making of a dramatist often depend finally upon the ability to revise well. There is many a person with a flair for dramatic writing who can turn out a promising first draft, quite as good or better than many a first draft which becomes a good play, but there the process stops, a bright potentiality half realized. Ability to revise depends first of all upon knowledge of dramatic technique. Some people have an instinct for drama by which with very little conscious knowledge of technique they produce good first drafts. And the experienced dramatist who has studied technique intensively, mastered it, and applied it many times, reaches the point where he uses the knowledge he has acquired subconsciously for the most part. That is when technical knowledge operates most effectively. What is called inspiration is a stimulated state of activity which somehow taps the subconscious resources of knowledge. It is seldom either for the untaught genius or the experienced dramatist that the flow of inspiration is continuous for the writing of an entire drama, and sometimes what felt like inspiration at the time turns out to have been merely excitement. After inspiration has done all that it can initially, conscious knowledge of dramatic principles goes to work to fill in the gaps and redirect the inspiration where it has gone astray. A problem of revision

may be solved by main strength and hard labor, but what fortunately often happens is that concentration leads to a fresh mood of inspiration in which the problem of construction is solved or the unsatisfactory passage rewritten. A good deal of inspiration comes like fire from rubbing sticks. The periods of forced labor generate creative energy for the final writing. All artistic creation, but especially drama with its severely formal basis, depends upon an interplay of conscious intellectual discipline with imagination.

In addition to technical knowledge what makes a successful reviser are for the most part mental habits, the ability to fall out of love with something one has written, and to face hard work. How hard a young writer works at revision is usually an indication of how much he cares about becoming a dramatist. It is not the most talented young people who write their plays most easily. Their interest supplies a sustaining intensity even to the more mechanical parts of the job. This year a brilliant young man who had won a scholarship in national competition on his first play the year before came to my office in a state of high excitement. He was still working on a new play then in its third draft. He had just discovered a new method for revision which had worked so well he wanted me to tell my other students about it so they could use it too. So I am offering it here. The end of his second act had worried him and he couldn't put his finger on the trouble, except that the right rhythm of intensity, the wave movement, wasn't there; he felt sure he had the material for climax, and the climax didn't come off. He marked off that last section of the act into, as he said, its indivisible dramatic units. Then he numbered a card for each unit, and wrote on the card what happened, the function, and the emotional effect. He laid the cards out on a table in order as in the play and studied them, concentrating especially on the emotional effects. He had been counting for his climax on the material of, I think it was the third card from the last, and had tried to build up to that, but found that the material of the fifth card from the last had potentially more intensity; the effect of five killed that of three, but was itself not adequately led

up to. He found that he could switch five and three, three becoming the build-up to five as the climax. The student was, of course, applying the principle of the scenario minutely to revision.

The other student who went the farthest in revision this year was a brilliant young man already recognized as a poet who came to the University of Michigan for graduate study of playwriting also on a national scholarship. He rewrote his play five times. The results on both of these young men's plays justified their own faith in what they were doing and the labor. The purposes which prompted some of these rewritings are revealing. In each case the first rewriting represented a development in the author's thought on his subject which came out of the process of writing itself. In one play the author wrote a full scenario and the first draft of the first act with one of two principal characters the center of interest. As he wrote, the secondary character became the more interesting of the two for the author, with the result that on the original structural plan the interest was too evenly divided. A new scenario was written with the original protagonist thoroughly subordinated to the other character. The centering of interest on a different character also changed the theme of the play, and made possible a one-set play where before there had been several changes of scene. It is significant that the original protagonist was based on a character in life, while the new protagonist was the creation of the author's imagination and became the more real of the two to him. The other student's play was based on an historical episode for which he did intensive research. By the time the first scenario was written the author's conception of his subject had expanded so that the original episode became only the nucleus of an action of much broader imaginative sweep and significance of theme. One of the rewritings after the first draft was structural, for the rhythm of the scenes, and another was for characterizations. The play was a poetic drama, and the last rewriting was a thorough polishing and invigoration of the dialogue. The first young man's play was a complex psychological study of the protagonist. His last rewriting was for the purpose of

eliminating every superfluous word, and especially to eliminate expository analysis for direct revelation of the character. The result was a hammered-out economy and hard dramatic impact of great power.

There are no rules for revision; the problem is different for every play and every writer. For some writers, everything that is possible is done in the heat of the period of continuous concentration on the play. For others the play needs to be laid aside and allowed to grow cold for critical detachment. Sometimes when a play is laid aside the characters go on living in the author's mind. He becomes better acquainted with them and can go back to the play and enrich the characterizations. We know that happened for Ibsen in writing *A Doll's House*, as we have an earlier draft than the final one preserved in *Ibsen's Workshop*. The earlier draft is a finished play and a very good one, but the *Doll's House* which Ibsen gave to the public is a much finer play. The character of Nora is deepened and the theme which has its source in her is similarly transformed. A study of the whole of the volume entitled in English *Ibsen's Workshop*, notes, scenarios, and drafts for his plays left at his death, is extremely suggestive for processes before and after the first draft in writing a play.

After all the stress on revision, it is perfectly possible for a first draft to be written which does not need to be touched. An experienced dramatist may write such a play out of his arduous experience in writing and rewriting in the past, but that doesn't count here. An inexperienced dramatist may do the same thing for any of several reasons. He may have done especially thorough scenario work and have the kind of mind that advances to finality in scenario. He may have undertaken a play which happened to fall easily within his capacities. In that case it may be a good play, but if his imagination receives the right stimulus he will write a more important play some day, and have to work harder to do it. Or he may be a genius, and the way in which genius works is its own affair.

Sometimes when a play needs revision the author revises too much. In rewriting some part of the play he acquires a

new impetus and keeps on going, destroying what was good. Critical discrimination for what is right in the first draft is as necessary as for what is wrong or the weeding fever will pull up the flowers. Then, too, there is the question of apprentice work. It sometimes happens that the first play does not justify the expenditure of a great amount of revision-time for its ultimate value, and yet may be thoroughly worth revising for the experience to be gained. The best way to learn to write a better play is to carry the first play through to the limit. It is necessary, however, to recognize the limit, to perfect the play for what it is, and not waste time trying to make something else out of it.

One way confusion, if not madness, lies, and that is in letting too many people offer suggestions. No one from a Broadway producer to a grocery boy ever reads a new play without suggesting that something in it should be changed. A single competent critic with a detached mind can be very helpful. Even then, the author should accept no suggestion unless it takes hold, until he himself has a feeling of its rightness.

XII. VARIETY

THE view of drama focused through a single long play must now be broadened by a glimpse at the range of possibilities open in the writing of plays. *The Cherry Orchard*, *From Morn to Midnight*, and *Yellow Jack* have been selected as sufficiently strange bedfellows in one theatre for the purpose. *The Cherry Orchard* represents a realistic content and technique markedly different from that of Ibsen's plays, *From Morn to Midnight* is an expressionistic drama, and *Yellow Jack* is a highly individual solution of a fresh problem for the theatre.

One of the greatest attractions to the writer in the present-day theatre is its variety. What is responsible more than any other one thing for that variety of form is the impulse toward reality. When Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House* in 1879, the European theatre had become for a time a theatre of escape. Romantic plays in medieval or oriental settings that were imitative of the great poetic drama of the Elizabethan period without adjustment to a new time and stage, sensational melodramas in which the fights were staged to music, and songs and dances were featured, and what has come to be called the "well-made play" constituted the bulk of theatrical fare. In America there was a scattering of plays which aimed at social significance, such as the famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a number of lurid portrayals of the evils of drink, but they were crude in form, and tended to depend upon melodramatic sensationalism rather than development of character for the enforcement of theme. The well-made play as a type was created by the prolific French dramatist, Emile Scribe, and because of a fresh technical excellence its influence spread through the theatres of Europe. There was preparation for a significant approach to reality in the well-made play. Scribe and his followers developed a unified and

well-knit structure of suspense. They eliminated irrelevant dialogue, declamatory speeches, and sensationalism. Their plays were contemporary in setting and held the audience by straight plot interest. The characteristic material was amorous and political intrigue, and the purpose light entertainment. Characterization was undeveloped, the dialogue was unnatural, and truth to life was violated by the constant dependence on coincidence and artificial concealments for the sake of surprise and suspense.

The beginnings of social purpose appeared in such plays before Ibsen. Ibsen took the form and transformed it with mastery and decision. He developed characterization as the foundation of the play, and with the realities of human experience to work with, he embodied ideas of social significance in his own plays and gave force to their presentation. The speech of daily life was brought to the service of characterization. Asides and soliloquies were dispensed with, and exposition was integrated with the dramatic movement. In place of the mechanical construction of suspense and surprise, Ibsen developed a plot of much greater tension because it evolved out of character and profoundly affected real people. The result was modern realistic drama in which conventions are reduced to the minimum. The basic convention of realism is that there is no convention. The illusion is aimed at for the audience that they are not in a theatre contemplating a work of art, but looking through an enlarged keyhole at what happens to be transpiring in someone's private life. Because Ibsen was a great dramatist and came early in the movement, his work exerted a powerful individual influence. The direction of his genius was determined, however, by widespread social forces. The advances in the physical sciences of the middle of the nineteenth century created upheavals of thought, and developed a sense for concrete reality. Economic changes intensified social problems. Ibsen had forerunners without his genius, and in other countries simultaneously with Ibsen's work and a little later appeared great dramatists, as Tolstoy and Chekhov in Russia and Hauptmann in Germany, who independently represented the same force, the impulse toward reality in the theatre.

Drama of escape resolves itself pretty readily into a few elements, romantic adventures of love and heroism, the picturesque, artificial excitements, and the artificially happy ending. The several modes of drama of escape of the nineteenth century all became stereotyped and the theatre monotonous. Life itself is infinitely various, and with the impulse toward reality the theatre has become rich and varied. The impulse toward reality did not stop with creating realism as a dramatic type. All of reality cannot be revealed through a keyhole. Some themes lie too deep for realism. Expressionism developed in the effort to find ways of putting concretely on the stage the struggles which go on entirely within men's minds. Some themes are too broad for realism, and dramatists have found devices by which to bring within the hour or two of the stage a broad sweep of human experience, as in *Bury the Dead* and *Yellow Jack*.

Within the realistic mode itself, there is as much difference between the content and techniques of *A Doll's House*, Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* as between realistic and expressionistic plays. Victor Sardou, the disciple of Scribe, learned to write plays by first studying a large number of Scribe's dramas (he had five hundred to choose from); then he would read only the first act of a play by Scribe, finish the plot himself, and check what he had done by the master's conclusion. It would be difficult to imagine attempting to learn to write plays in that manner from Ibsen's works. From a play by Ibsen one learns the fundamentals of construction and technique and the principle of evolving each plot individually out of the characters. *A Doll's House*, for example, is simple and direct in its form because Nora is a comparatively simple and direct character; she knows what she wants. *Hedda Gabler* is a complex character. She is entangled in her own impulses; neurotic, bored, she beats about for an outlet to her personality without knowing what she wants. In *A Doll's House*, the attack is a sharply defined situation: Krogstad threatens to reveal Nora's forgery to Helmer unless his position in the bank is secured; Nora sets about preventing revelation of the forgery. The attack comes fairly early in Act I with a defi-

nite dramatic move on Krogstad's part, followed by a dramatic move from Nora which leads to further complication for the curtain. In *Hedda Gabler* the entire first act is exposition, but exposition which continually builds up question. We learn that Hedda is dissatisfied and restless in her marriage to George Tesman, and that she is selfish, cold, and unscrupulous. We learn that Mrs. Elvsted and Eilert Lovborg are in a mutually important but delicately poised relationship which could be disrupted by some woman whom Lovborg has known in the past. Just at the curtain, by Hedda's reference to her pistols, we learn that Hedda is that woman. The attack, then, consists only in the general question, what will Hedda do? The question is intensely interesting because we know that Hedda is in a position to do something, and that what she will do is unpredictable because of conflicting motives in her. There is no force driving Hedda to do anything except her own inner turbulence, but that has been revealed sufficiently for the audience to feel that the curtain has gone down on a highly explosive situation, like seeing a careless and reckless individual about to light matches in a powder room. The play continues, like *A Doll's House*, to evolve in structural type out of the principal character.

The impulse toward reality led Chekhov to present in *The Cherry Orchard* a neglected field for drama, the tragedy of inaction. Ibsen presented the striving of the will of the individual toward a positively determined end, a drama of action and the consequences of action, whether victory or defeat. Even in *Hedda Gabler*, what makes the drama is a set of circumstances which crystallizes Hedda's conflicting and indeterminate impulses into a line of action. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov presents characters who know what they want, but in whom there is a paralysis of will, who are tossed about helplessly by a changing environment. Instead of resisting, they drift before an impending fate until it overtakes them. As a result, the plot in its main outline is exceedingly simple with few complications. Madame Ranevsky is a landowner, a representative of a decadent aristocracy whose fortunes were founded before the liberation of the serfs. Her estate includes a famous cherry or-

chard, the largest in the province. The cherry orchard is no longer profitable, but is the object of sentimental attachment. The entire estate will be sold at auction unless money is raised to pay the mortgage. That is the attack. A way to save their home is proposed by a friend, Lopakhin. Lopakhin is the son of a former serf of Madame Ranevsky's father, but has become a merchant and wealthy, a representative of the new vigorous commercial class. Lopakhin's proposal is to cut down the cherry orchard and lease it in building lots for villas. Madame Ranevsky and her brother will not hear of such a thing. The main line of complications consists simply of Lopakhin's repeated reminders of the necessity for action, with the continued drifting of Madame Ranevsky and her brother. The day of the auction arrives; Lopakhin himself buys the property to cut up for villas. That is the crisis. Madame Ranevsky and her family and household leave the old home to find a new life in their several ways, the resolution.

Such an action, in which so little happens, is possible for drama only by concentration on what the characters are and their emotions. There are three requisites to the success of such a play, all strikingly realized in *The Cherry Orchard*. First, the characters must be people who feel a great deal in proportion to the external events of their lives. The background of a decadent culture contributes this element to *The Cherry Orchard*. The sensitivity of the characters has increased as they have declined in vigor of action. They are people whose feelings shift and vary with every slightest breath of outside influence. Secondly, the dramatist must be at once scientifically and sympathetically interested in the characters to make even their most trivial emotions and responses of interest to the audience. Chekhov, trained as a physician, dissects and lays bare the emotions of his characters with the detachment and precision of an anatomist with his scalpel. At the same time, he was a man of gentleness and broad human sympathies. With the detached recognition of the inevitability of change and the advance of new forces in *The Cherry Orchard*, there is sadness for the beauty, though decaying, which must pass, and exalted expectancy

for new life to come. Trophimof speaks for Chekhov when he says, "There is happiness; it is coming toward us, nearer and nearer; I can hear the sound of its footsteps. . . . And if we do not see it, if we do not know it, what does it matter? Others will see it." Poetry and faith permeate the naturalistic detail of *The Cherry Orchard*.

Finally, there is the technique. The single incident of *The Cherry Orchard* is resolved not by the focusing of a particular set of energies in conflict but by a drifting of the total selves of the characters. Chekhov achieves the necessary intimacy and completeness of self-revelation of the characters out of apparently casual, irrelevant speech and incident. Instead of character forced to the surface under tension and revealed in a single glaring moment, character rises gently to the surface in the absence of pressure and is revealed bit by bit. No single moment of revelation is heavily underscored, but the totality takes form by almost imperceptible degrees. *The Cherry Orchard* represents the ultimate development of the convention of realism; the illusion is created of photographic completeness and lack of emphasis. Such an effect requires an especial delicacy and precision of selection and ordering of detail. The most trivial remark in juxtaposition to matters of greatest moment may be essentially revealing. The pattern is intricate and minute, and the eye becomes lost in the mass of apparently undistinguished detail at first glance, but if a single detail were removed its absence would be acutely felt. In close association with accurate external reality, Chekhov produced a drama of such extreme inwardness as to approach the material of expressionism.

A few comments on Act II of *The Cherry Orchard* will illustrate the method. The act opens on four of the servants, two men and two women, seated in the garden. The garden, as a setting, with the touch of crumbling age upon it, is like the life that is lived there, decadent but beautiful. The apparently irrelevant conversation of the servants is a reduced reflection of the larger background as in a concave mirror. The amusing affectations of delicacy and refinement of the housemaid Dunyasha and the young man-servant

Yasha reflect the too effete society. Ephikhodof, the clerk, with his affectation of learning and intellectuality, and his detached consideration of the problem of his preferences—"Do I want to live or do I want to shoot myself, so to speak?"—is a satire on the ineffectuality of the intelligentsia. Similarly, the tendency to impractical speculation as a Russian characteristic is satirized in the governess's dwelling on the problem, "Who I am, or why I exist, is a mystery." In the opening of the next act the governess appears as a bright, cheery little soul adding to the gaiety of a party with her conjuring tricks, which is Chekhov's answer to her moody speculations of Act II. The stage is cleared of the servant group except for Yasha, who remains sitting and smoking a cigar.

Madame Ranevsky, her brother Gayef, and Lopakhin, the merchant, enter. Lopakhin is making an attack for action to prevent the sale of the cherry orchard. Yasha's cigar gives occasion for Madame Ranevsky's first remark, "Who's smoking horrible cigars here?" which shows her easily diverted from the crucial topic by a shudder of offended refinement. The line is a tiny piece in the total pattern, of the same color as Madame Ranevsky's reaction to villas a little later. While Lopakhin vainly tries to gain their serious attention, Gayef and Madame Ranevsky run on with their own line of thought and conversation about a trip to town. They are at ease in their garden, and their conversation is relaxed, following the course of suggestion. Lopakhin drags the two for a moment into consideration of his plan of cutting up the cherry orchard for villa leases, only to have villas dismissed by Madame Ranevsky as "so vulgar." Lopakhin threatens to leave; Madame Ranevsky begs him to stay because "it's gayer when you're here." After a pause, she remarks, "I keep expecting something to happen, as if the house were going to tumble down about our ears." She is quite unconscious of the literal truth in her figure of speech; she is lost in a mood in which she has forgotten what occasioned it. Gayef in abstraction thinks aloud about a billiard problem, a regular habit of his. Madame Ranevsky's mood leads to the characteristically Russian thought of retribution for sins, and a

recount of past follies and the impulses that have driven her. She forgets the idea of sin, and becomes lost in the emotions of the experiences themselves. Music of a local band is heard, and turns the conversation completely. Lopakhin succumbs to the mood of the hour and also becomes self-revelatory. Gayef drifts along about impossible possibilities of obtaining money. Madame Ranevsky and Gayef are revealed throughout as lovable helpless children; Gayef is like a good little boy, and his sister has a child's warm impulsiveness of self-condemnation, generosity, and tenderness.

Anya and Barbara, Madame Ranevsky's daughter and adopted daughter, and Trophimof, the family tutor and a believer in the "New Russia," enter. The affection within the family is revealed. Trophimof, the intellectual idealist, and Lopakhin, the uneducated moneymaker, spar with each other a little, which leads to an exalted speech from each envisioning a new Russia in his own way. At this peak the conversation is left in midair by the passing of Ephikhodof to the back of the scene, playing on his guitar. Madame Ranevsky remarks pensively, "There goes Ephikhodof." Anya says pensively, "There goes Ephikhodof," and Gayef, "The sun has set." The glory which had been spread out before them is forgotten; they are back in their little garden. The extreme inconsequence of the double remark on the passing of Ephikhodof reveals where their hearts are, its significance lying entirely in its relation to what immediately precedes. The mood of beauty and melancholy falls upon them all as they sit pensively and engage in quiet casual talk. The sensitiveness of emotion in proportion to external cause appears in the conclusion of the scene:

MADAME RANEVSKY: Come, everyone, let's go in; it's getting late. (*To ANYA*) You've tears in your eyes. What is it, little one? (*Embracing her.*)

ANYA: Nothing, mamma, I'm all right.

Before the group has responded to Madame Ranevsky's suggestion that they go in, a Tramp appears who frightens Barbara. The Tramp is an intrusion of harsh reality, and shatters the previous mood. Members of the group react

characteristically. Madame Ranevsky gives the man a sovereign because she has no smaller coin. Barbara reminds her there is nothing for the servants to eat at home. Madame Ranevsky borrows money from Lopakhin. Lopakhin makes an uncouth attempt at gallantry to Barbara. Gayef longs for a game of billiards. They all go in except Trophimof and Anya, with a parting reminder of the date of the auction from Lopakhin.

Trophimof and Anya are left alone. Trophimof talks of the new Russia and happiness to come. Anya is enchanted by all he says.

ANYA: What have you done to me, Peter? Why is it that I no longer love the cherry orchard as I did? I used to love it so tenderly; I thought there was no better place on earth than our garden.

TROPHIMOF: All Russia is our garden. The earth is great and beautiful; it is full of wonderful places.

They are beginning to fall in love, but Trophimof does not know it because he thinks love too petty and personal for his great dream and purpose. Anya sees that the moon is rising. Barbara is heard calling, but Peter and Anya slip away down to the river, for "it is lovely there." Anya's little personal garden and the garden of Trophimof's great dream are drawing together. At the close of the act, the past has been laid beautifully to rest, and the foundation laid for the sense of hope in fresh new life at the end of the play.

The Cherry Orchard is a play to be read many times and studied minutely if the precision of Chekhov's technique is to be clear. Although there is so little action, and sombre tones are part of the pattern, the effect in the theatre, with understanding production and acting, is that of vivacity. The sensitivity of the characters fills the play with laughter and tears, as may be observed from the stage directions. And although Chekhov spoke of his theme as the tragedy of inaction, the play is alive with comedy, in the affectations of the servants, in Madame Ranevsky's and Gayef's ineffectualities, in such ironies as Trophimof's concluding the longest and most solemn speech in the play, a tirade against Rus-

sian weaknesses, with "I am afraid of solemn faces; I dislike them; I am afraid of solemn conversations. Let us rather hold our tongues." Every character in the play, except perhaps Anya and Barbara, receives some satirical touch, yet the play is instinct with tenderness. The unerring eye for realistic detail has more often than not been associated with drabness in literature, but *The Cherry Orchard* is permeated with poetry and beauty.

Chekhov, like Ibsen, has been extremely influential in modern drama. Modern life has been increasingly productive of the first requisite of the Chekhovian type of drama, of characters who feel a great deal in proportion to the external events of their lives. Economic pressures and the increasing complexity of civilization have tended to narrow the scope of individual activity and to restrain direct outward responses. Emotions are dammed up behind frustrations to action—and life becomes introverted and drama internal, revealed bit by bit in a small reaction here and another there rather than in big obvious crises. Sometimes the dam bursts and there is an outbreak of violence. Such occurrences are so exceptional in modern society that they are news and make the newspaper headlines. Characteristically, if one searches for the blunt facts underneath the glamour with which news reporters serve up such material to the public, one finds that the people involved in the murder and sex headlines are not the most interesting kind of people. Their lives assumed the outward appearance of drama not because of stronger emotions but because of weaker minds and absence of control, the product not of more vigorous will, but of a less complexly directed will. The young woman whose shapely legs are featured in the photographs and who dared everything for the man she loved, including the interesting action of putting a bullet through her husband's head, turns out to be of definitely subnormal or moronic type. Such information appears in a single casual sentence near the end of a two-column story. In modern life dramas of love and hate, hope and despair, may be seething within a background of domestic routine, sometimes even unsuspected by the companions of that routine.

Clifford Odets in *Awake and Sing* has made drama out of the experiences of a household of city persons whose lives have been largely frustrated by the increasing economic pressure of just managing to get along respectably. The material and method of the play suggest the influence, direct or indirect, of Chekhov. Nevertheless, as Harold Clurman points out in an Introduction to *Three Plays* by Odets, the temper of the play is in extreme contrast to that of *The Cherry Orchard*, more akin to Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*. The temper of Odets' work is, however, like that of Chekhov's and O'Casey's, highly individual, and comes fresh from the author and the background of his characters. Probably both O'Casey and Odets learned something from Chekhov, and what they learned was absorbed into highly individual creation which in turn becomes an influence. Nothing can be more wearying in drama than pseudo-Chekhov—or pseudo-Ibsen, or pseudo-Odets. But wherever in life there is inhibition, from any cause, to vigorous expression of emotion in external action, and a strong original impulse in the dramatist to give fresh quality and tone, there is opportunity for application of the basic principles of Chekhov's technique.

Expressionism represents the ultimate in inwardness of drama. It is an attempt to find means of representing in visible form for the stage the dramatic material which finds no adequate and clear expression in speech and action. Like the Chekhovian drama, expressionism is a result of the decline in modern life of external activity as the center of significance. Expressionism as a self-conscious and defined movement developed first in Germany in the World War and post-war period. Shortly after nineteen hundred, however, the Russian dramatist Leonid Andreyev enunciated the view of modern life which was to give rise to expressionism. Andreyev criticized the old drama of external action and realism as unsuited to expression of the most significant experiences in modern life; a new protagonist had arisen, the intellect. He contrasted the lives of Benvenuto Cellini, artist and bravo, a typical man of the Renaissance, with that of Friedrich Nietzsche as a typical modern man. Cellini, in his life of

monks, dukes, swords, and mandolins, as it appears in his famous *Autobiography*, encountered more adventures in a short walk from the edge of his city to his home than the average modern man in his entire life. Nietzsche was in the least degree a dramatic figure in his early life as a Prussian soldier. That part of his life was so little significant that few people are even aware of it. The real drama of his life began just when he withdrew into the silence and inactivity of the study. There was enacted the painful revaluations and tragical struggle of his intellect; from the study came the intellectual and personal break with Wagner; from his study issued *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Modern life, said Andreyev, has become more psychological; not love, nor hunger, nor ambition, but thought in its sufferings, joys, and struggles is the true hero of the life of today. Andreyev found means, such as the use of masks and allegorical characters and action, to externalize on the stage the conflicts of the intellect. His dramas were revolutionary in their day, but in two decades the principle of his drama and his devices were to become widely familiar through the expressionistic movement.

Expressionism is essentially a product of the penetration into the human mind of the modern sciences of psychology and sociology. Psychology has centered attention on the stream-of-consciousness, the huge mass of mental content which does not find utterance in speech and therefore can never become the material of dialogue for realistic drama. Sociology views human impulses not individually, but in the mass, as social forces. Abstract ideas, such as the Mob, or a class as a unit, such as capitalists or miners, cannot be characters in a realistic drama. Yet the unexpressed fields of consciousness are the scenes of conflict, and social forces are in conflict. Wherever there is conflict there is the material of drama. Expressionism, although it has the appearance of fantasy, is an extension of realism inward to the areas of psychological experience and of abstract ideas. In the totality of life, inner conflict not only bulks larger than external action, but is determinative of external action. Expressionism is an attempt to get at the foundations of action, and

is often combined with realistic presentation of the external action which results from the mental action.

The first technical problem of expressionism is to find means of objectifying its material on the stage. The problem and the means vary endlessly. Some of the most common devices have been vision scenes, stream-of-consciousness monologues and asides, masks, allegorical characters and action, type characters, and projection of a mental state in stage setting. Eugene O'Neill has been the most fertile in expressionistic experiment of American dramatists. In *The Emperor Jones* the subconscious ancestral content of Jones's mind awakened by the beating of the tom-toms is projected on the stage in the vision scenes. In *The Hairy Ape* the bulk of the play consists of monologues representing the stream-of-consciousness of the stoker Yank, the flow of half-formulated ideas in unfinished sentences and disjointed phrases with tangents of thought and leaps by association of ideas which form the unspoken movement of the mind. In *Strange Interlude* external, or realistic, dialogue is intermingled with asides expressing what is passing through the mind of the speaker. In *The Great God Brown*, Dion Anthony represents allegorically the joyous life-asserting and the ascetic life-denying impulses in human nature, and the actor carries two masks; for one aspect of the character one mask is held to the face, and the other mask for the other aspect. In *The Hairy Ape* the members of the crowd that issues from the Fifth Avenue church wear identical masks, are dressed alike, and move as automata, embodying a social force of unconsciousness of the existence of the stoker. Expressionistic drama abounds in unnamed type characters, as Bank Cashier, Mother, Wife, First and Second Daughter, in Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, and A Pedlar, A Beggar, Two Drunkards, An Officer, A Street-walker in Toller's *The Machine-wreckers*. The first scene of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* is the bedroom of Mr. Zero, a bookkeeper. The stage directions call for walls papered with foolscap covered with columns of figures, a projection of the mental content of the protagonist.

Expressionism is an attempt to lift the skullcap and look

inside at the brain and see how it works, or to X-ray human life in society and see the forces at work underneath the external phenomena. The second technical problem after invention of devices for projection is clarity. The projection is indirect; ideas are embodied in flesh and blood characters and external action on the stage, and the symbolism must be clear without burdensome exposition or too obvious labeling. The stream-of-consciousness is incoherent and blurred, and yet significant. It is the conflicts in vague, half-formed, subsiding and recurrent thoughts and impulses which ultimately focus to external action in human life. If it is to be presented dramatically, the stream-of-consciousness as such must be preserved in its essential character and yet the line of conflict be accented sufficiently for the audience to perceive and follow it at the pace of theatre presentation. The problem of selection and arrangement is of the utmost delicacy and calls for at once a scientific and artistic precision.

A typical expressionistic play demands close attention from an audience, an audience which is willing to cooperate with expenditure of energy in the theatre. This suggests a narrower audience than realism, a difficulty which has been met to a considerable degree by the use of exaggerated theatricality on the part of many expressionistic dramatists. It is a curious fact that expressionistic drama, which is intellectual in impulse, has been notably melodramatic and picturesque in execution, abounding in allegorical murders and suicides, and in striking stage settings. O'Neill's last expressionistic play, *Days Without End*, however, was quiet in execution, and one of the most tense moments in the play was the scene in which the protagonist merely sits on a couch and argues against the promptings of the sinister figure embodying his own destructive impulses who stands in half-light at his shoulder. The sense of struggle was acute. Violence is not necessarily a property of expressionism.

Georg Kaiser was an early leader of expressionistic experiment in Germany, like Eugene O'Neill in this country. His most famous play, *From Morn to Midnight*, in the fine English translation by Ashley Dukes, was produced by the Theatre Guild in 1922. In so far as any one play can repre-

sent kaleidoscopic variety, it is a typical expressionistic play and one of the most perfect in execution.

The external action of the play is simply that a cashier absconds with funds from his bank, tempted suddenly out of his life of dull routine by the appearance of accessibility to adventure in a beautiful woman who enters the bank. He discovers that the woman is entirely respectable, and is left with the money in his hands, return to the bank impossible. He tramps through the snow for a day to elude the police, finds that he has walked in a circle, and shoots himself. The play is in seven scenes. In Scene I the Cashier absconds with the funds, in Scene II he learns that the woman is not what he thought she was, and in Scene III he starts across the field of snow. In Scene III the external action merges into the internal action, which occupies the rest of the play, and consists of what passes through his mind while he walks. In Scene VII, just at the final curtain, the play merges into the external action again.

The theme of the play is Man seeking an ultimate value in life, something worth the devotion of the whole self. The slight external action is itself allegorical. The Cashier's life of routine is typical of that of the mass of humanity, existing without individual choice and volition in submission to external circumstances. The Cashier is aroused into individual activity by an illusion, but when it has faded, he has become conscious of his own mind and will and cannot go back. The money in his possession is power and freedom: "I must spend, I've got the cash. Where are the goods that are worth the whole sum? Sixty thousand and the buyer to boot—flesh and bones—body and soul. Deal with me! Sell to me—I have the money, you have the goods—let us trade." This is Man confronting life in the freedom of his will and power of his mind to choose the object of his energies. The first two scenes are external action but highly stylized and simplified for their allegorical implication. They introduce and furnish the attack for the real conflict of the play, the Cashier's mental struggle to find an ultimate value in life, as it is expressed in the last scene: "What is the goal, what is the prize, that's worth the whole stake?" Scene III

is a stream-of-consciousness monologue. As the Cashier walks through the snow he passes a naked tree which by a lighting device is changed to a skeleton, the thought of death in the Cashier's mind projected in stage-setting. In terms of the external action, his thought is to shoot himself rather than keep up the struggle to elude the police; in terms of the inner action, that possibly death is the sole end of life, which he rejects. The four scenes following are vision scenes projecting on the stage the various ends of life which pass successively through the Cashier's mind in his effort at evaluation. Each scene represents the Cashier entering a new situation with money in his possession to gain what he wants, each objective is revealed as unsatisfactory.

In Scene IV the Cashier returns to his home. Perhaps domesticity and physical comfort, the cozy circle in which as son, husband, and father he is the center of interest, is the best thing in life. He is repelled by the narrowness of routine, fixed habit, and commonplaceness. The scene has an appearance of external realism, but the details are exaggerated, drawn to sharp points for the inner significance, as when the Cashier announces his intention of leaving while the pork chops are cooking, and his mother drops dead: "For once in his life a man goes out before his meal—and that kills her." Scene V at the cycle races represents the senseless struggle for success, for money, power, whatever it may be. The end is no matter, the means are no matter, only frenzied passion exists: "When life is at fever heat some must die." But His Royal Highness enters his box and there is quiet. Passion cannot be the end in itself; there is always something beyond passion, some restraint to which it is subject. In the sixth scene the Cashier tests pleasure and the flesh. He appears in a cabaret with four masked ladies: one answers nothing but "Fizz!" to his every attempt at conversation, two are revoltingly ugly when they remove their masks, the fourth reveals a wooden leg when he calls on her to dance; he finds no mind, no inner beauty, no joy. In this scene, as a casual by-product of the pursuit of pleasure, a waiter is driven to suicide. In Scene VII the Cashier enters a Salvation Army Hall. The objects of the past scenes are reviewed in the penitents' stories

of what they have renounced for the soul. The Cashier decides that the soul is the only thing, he will give himself up to the police and seek his soul through confession and atonement, he wants nothing money can buy. He scatters his bank notes and the penitents scramble madly for them. The soul is revealed as an illusion, pursued when the body can't go on, forgotten when new sensations are provided for.

A Salvation Army Lass has followed the Cashier through the preceding scenes and now comes and stands by his side. The Cashier sees in love one last possible ultimate goal, "Maiden and man . . . eternal constancy . . . the seed and the flower . . . sense and aim and goal!" The Salvation Army Lass slips out and returns with the police: "There he is! I've shown him to you! I've earned the reward."

The Cashier stands—alone, and rises to something of ecstasy in his own aloneness. Man is; there is no goal outside his own consciousness; and his end is death. The center lights are put out; light from the side falls on a tangle of wires overhead and they form a skeleton in outline. The Cashier has moved in a circle to return to his first thought of the morning. He shoots himself.

Structurally, in truth to the material, the play is episodic, a series of scenes without act division. Each scene of the Cashier's quest is a perfect dramatic unit in itself, with attack, crisis and resolution, but as each comes to the same conclusion, they follow one another at the same level until the last one. Here the débâcle of the soul is developed climactically to build up to the crisis of the play in the betrayal of the Cashier by the Salvation Army Lass. Then the play moves swiftly in two or three minutes' playing-time to the resolution. Tension is sustained through the series of episodes by the sharp, decisive structure of each scene separately, by the staccato nervous speech rhythm and compressed imagery, and by the rising desperate eagerness as the pursuit narrows with the elimination of one answer for life after another.

The thought of the play is wholly destructive. Kaiser packs the scenes with devastating social satire, and works in the play solely as a wrecker, tearing down dilapidated struc-

tures to clear the ground for a new edifice for humanity. There is no suggestion of the form the new edifice will take. The play is devoid of human warmth, but is exciting in the cold passion for destruction of what is useless, and rises to something of ecstasy at the end in the consciousness of standing on ground clean of all illusions.

Conditions of modern life intensified the impulse that produced expressionism, but neither the impulse nor the material and methods are new. The medieval morality plays were allegories of inner conflict and objectified abstract ideas on the stage, as appears immediately from the names of characters from the most familiar of the moralities, *Everyman*: Everyman, Kindred, Good-deeds, Discretion, Beauty, etc. Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* is a forerunner in theme and method of *From Morn to Midnight*, and the soliloquies of Hamlet clearly represent the impulse toward psychological realism and prepared for the stream-of-consciousness monologue. In modern drama, Ibsen in *Peer Gynt* and Strindberg in his *Dream Play*, as well as Andreyev, prepared for the expressionistic movement. Expressionism may be more or less narrowly defined. It has lost its distinctness as a movement and merged with the theatre as a whole. Beyond its direct contribution, expressionism was a part of the general breaking down of the stolidly realistic outlook in the theatre which has opened the way for more varied imagination, poetry, and new material and forms of many kinds.

Yellow Jack by Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif is one of the finest examples of the freedom and flexibility of the contemporary stage. The material, the story of the conquest of yellow fever, as conceived by Mr. de Kruif and Mr. Howard, was about as difficult as could readily be imagined for stage presentation. They aimed at the epic quality of science. If they had been satisfied to write a simple human-interest play of men who risked their lives, their task would have been easier and the result less broadening to the theatre. That is exactly what was done in the moving picture made from the play. The cinema presentation limited the story to the episode in Cuba in which a group of scientists by experimentation first on themselves and then on soldiers proved

that yellow fever was transmitted only by the bite of a particular species of mosquito. For broadly popular consumption, the interest was centered on the group of privates who volunteered for the experiment more than on the scientists. The leader of the group of privates was motivated by the readily popular and understandable motive of love for a pretty nurse, and the picture was essentially a drama of a group of common men who responded with sturdy simple heroism to a call of idealism. The doctors were rather colorless figures in the background who created the occasion of the drama. The exposition of the scientific problem was slight; when a pretty girl, comedy, and men risking their lives are united on the screen, it isn't necessary for the audience to have too clear an idea of what it is all about.

With the increasingly frequent appropriation by Hollywood of the best Broadway plays, *Yellow Jack* is a first-rate example of the danger that is developing of people thinking they are becoming acquainted with stage drama through the screen versions. There are always changes, with varying effect. In *These Three* from *The Children's Hour*, for example, the significance of the play was preserved and improved in presentation. The change from the tragic to the happy ending in *Winterset* was artistically right for the picture, not a popular concession, but the very fine picture offered an experience of much less importance than that of the stage play. The significance of *Yellow Jack* was diminished extremely, and to a degree unnecessarily.

The authors of the original *Yellow Jack* undertook to present not men confronting death, but men confronting ignorance. They risked their lives for the passion for knowledge. The conflict of *Yellow Jack* is the struggle of man's mind and will, as embodied in the scientists, to wrest knowledge from the vast unyielding bulk of the unknown. The devotion to knowledge is combined with the devotion to humanity in the application of the knowledge, and social forces of greed, prejudice, and fear stand in the way as complications in the larger conflict. The aim in *Yellow Jack* is to present not the simple heroism of the common man risking his life, but the heroism of man at his highest level, in which

the risk of life is only a dramatic apex of the power to rise above disappointments, failures, selfishness, human weaknesses, and go on endlessly in the pursuit of knowledge.

Such a purpose involved two problems which were brilliantly solved by a single device. A broader view than that of the episode in Cuba in 1900 was necessary, and fullness and clarity of exposition of the scientific problem. The play works backward chronologically from a scene in a laboratory in London, 1929, to a laboratory in West Africa, 1927, to Cuba, 1900. The two introductory scenes show scientists continuing in the struggle toward the final conquest of yellow fever, each man's work depending on the earlier achievements. The two introductory scenes accomplished the exposition for the body of the drama in Cuba. Each is also a tense episode which reveals the continuity of the struggle over decades and continents, and sets the Cuban episode in an epic movement. At the end of the play, after triumph in Cuba, there are brief flash-backs to West Africa, 1927, and London, 1929, revealing solution of the successive problems, and closing the play on the sense of epic expansion.

A further problem in the material is the division of the characters involved into two separate groups, the doctors of the American Yellow Fever Commission in Cuba and the privates, which necessitates following two separate lines of interest that touch each other only occasionally until drawn together in the call for volunteers. A considerable degree of the unity of effect achieved is due to the staging, as announced in the published form of the play: "This play is written to be produced without conventional scenery upon a modern approximation of the Elizabethan stage." This was a logical solution, as Elizabethan drama, deriving its form from the Elizabethan stage, habitually followed separate character groups without difficulty. *Yellow Jack* was staged with two levels, connected by two curving flights of steps. The upper level projected in a round bay between the steps; this space, with the minimum of furnishing, represented Reed's laboratory throughout the Cuban part of the play. A semicircular screen of wooden lattice, which was lighted from behind so as to suggest a protection against the glare

of tropical sunlight, furnished a background for the laboratory scenes, and was drawn forward on a circular track so as to shut off the space during other scenes. The lower level was the acting space for the soldiers, and contact between the two groups was established over the flights of steps. The fixed architectural setting tied the two groups together, and by turning the lights up and down on the several parts of the stage, it was possible to move swiftly without break in continuity from one scene to another. The staging also unifies the African and London scenes with the Cuban, making possible the feeling of epic continuity. Another device, from radio, bridges the gaps of time and space. As the lights fade down on the African scene and up on the first Cuban scene, there is the cross-fade of sound that radio drama has developed to indicate a change of scene. The singing of a soldier quartet is heard very faintly and gradually rises above the voice of Stokes as the lights go down on the African laboratory, 1927, continues in full volume for an interval of darkness, and diminishes as the lights come up on Cuba, 1900. The Cuban scenes are similarly blended with the soldiers' singing, which at the same time furnishes a background of mood for the Cuban action.

The problems of unity and epic expansion are partly solved by staging. Extremely well-devised construction and careful placement in the writing keep the interest centered where it is wanted and project the idea intended. The greatest difficulty is to keep the doctors and the pursuit of knowledge the center of climactic interest in the final, resolving movement of the play when the soldiers necessarily emerge into their role of importance. This is done in part by characterization; the soldiers are deliberately typed to a degree and presented sketchily, the medical men are highly individualized and their emotions and personal relations developed with intensity. In other words, advantage is taken of the fact that the doctors are men more highly organized nervously and mentally than the soldiers. Personal interest in the fate of the soldiers is further subordinated to the success or failure of the search for the yellow fever carrier by the attitude of the doctors. The doctors are intensely hu-

mane, their ultimate object is to save human suffering; but individual life or death is secondary for them throughout to discovery of the truth they are seeking. They themselves, before they called for volunteers, have faced the thing they are asking others to face, and one of their number is dead, and another barely escaped. They have done all they can and must depend on others to risk their lives. The heroism of the soldiers does not rise above the interest in the doctors and their problem but unites them with it. The human interest in the medical group is bridged over into the final movement by the fact that Lazear is dead, with Carroll's passion that he shall not have died uselessly, the end for which he died unattained.

Exactly what the authors of *Yellow Jack* accomplished is especially clear from a structural difference between the stage play and the screen adaptation. In the picture, the play is introductory until the call for volunteers, and the response of the four privates is the crisis. As the original play is constructed, the attack comes when the doctors are confronted by the fact that their problem can be solved only by experimenting on men. Experimentation on themselves, the rising action, proves not to be enough. They are confronted with failure or a new and more difficult decision. The crisis of the play is when Reed decides to go ahead on soldiers and call for volunteers. The decision of the privates derives its motive power from a more complex decision at a higher level of mentality. The scenes of the soldiers, with their thoughts of home, their desires and ambitions, and their homely comedy and good-fellowship, and the off-stage singing of the soldiers as a background, keep the thought of men as a warm reality constantly before the audience and serve to throw into relief the magnitude of Reed's purpose to save lives, and then the magnitude of his decision to risk lives for the knowledge which must come first.

Mr. Howard and Mr. de Kruif undertook to give compact dramatic unity to an historical panoramic presentation of a theme, to give human warmth and vigor to an idea above individual fates, and to draw the audience into identification with one of the highest levels of man's mind and will en-

gaged in a struggle of epic heroism, and succeeded notably. To solve the special problems of their dramatic material and purpose, they drew upon the Elizabethan theatre for the flow of scenes over a variety of acting spaces, with a suggestion of the Greek theatre in the sculptural quality of the setting, upon the cinema for the device of flash-backs, upon radio for fading in new scenes with sound, and upon the distinctly modern stage device of changing scenes by means of lighting. *Yellow Jack* does not belong to any established category of drama. It is one of many recent plays in which sound theatre knowledge and imagination were combined for an individual solution to an individual problem. Such plays do not suggest new dramatic modes in direct line of descent, but are a stimulus to courage and variety in the theatre.

XIII. HISTORICAL CONVENTIONS

MODERN drama through the development of historical knowledge, the flexibility of staging rendered by mechanics and lighting, and the vigor which produces experimentation has drawn richly upon the forms, conventions, and devices of the theatres of the past. Those theatres and their drama should be studied thoroughly. Such study will provide the writer with a fuller repertory of dramatic means to his ends and stimulate him to new solutions for new problems. He will also discover that through all the varying forms runs a common basic dramatic structure, and will realize more clearly what constitutes the foundation of drama. There is space here only to indicate the direction of such study.

Of all the dramas of the past, the Elizabethan, through Shakespeare, has been the most familiar. It is only comparatively recently, however, that scholarship has given us the Elizabethan stage which molded Shakespeare's drama, and Shakespearean production has been revitalized, not by historical reproduction in detail of Elizabethan staging, but by restoration of the essential attributes which grew out of that staging.

The characteristic Elizabethan theatre was a round, square, or octagonal tower-like structure three stories high. The seats were arranged in three galleries, one directly above another. The central area, called the pit, was a level floor open to the sky, where the people paying the lowest price of admission stood. The principal acting space was a large raised stage projecting into the pit from one side of the theatre. A high roof supported by two pillars projected over part of the stage. In the middle of the wall at the back of the stage was a wide opening with curtains which could be drawn to reveal an inner stage. At either side of this

rear opening was a door by which the actors entered and left the main outer stage. Above the inner stage was a similar alcove also available as a playing space when two levels were desired, as when Richard II appears upon the castle wall and parleys with Henry Bolingbroke in the courtyard below. A balcony might project from the upper alcove, so that the alcove may have represented Juliet's bedroom from which she emerged for the balcony scene with Romeo. There might also be a window above each of the side doors, from which a character could speak as from the window of a house to someone in the street below. The exact architectural details of the rear wall varied in different theatres. The roof above the outer stage was used for mechanical effects such as the descent of deities, and the main platform stage was provided with trapdoors for supernatural and other spectacular effects. The ghost of Hamlet's father undoubtedly made its mysterious appearances and disappearances by way of a trap. There was provision in mechanical devices for considerable elaboration of spectacular effects, but no scenery of illusion was used on the outer stage, only the barely necessary properties. The inner stage might be set more elaborately behind its curtains, to be revealed when time for the scene arrived.

The most obvious effect of such a stage on drama is flexibility of scene. All that was necessary for change of scene on the main outer stage was for actors to walk out one door at the rear of the stage and in at the other. The two curtained alcoves, upper and lower, which could be set during action on the outer stage, added to this flexibility. The dramatist could have almost any number of scenes, and could introduce very short scenes freely. There are forty-two scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, four of which are under ten lines long. As a result, Elizabethan drama not only shows great freedom of time and place, but complexity of story and numerous sub-plots. It was possible, as in the novel or cinema, to follow several groups of characters with ease. Elizabethan drama is expansive in material, rich in variety of characters, and mingles comedy and tragedy in the intricate patterns of life itself. Such freedom made

formlessness easy. The audience came to expect variety, and the dramatist had to control the several plot lines like the driver of a four-in-hand.

The Elizabethan stage produced a continuous, flowing action, and a dynamic effect to the eye for the audience. One scene flowed into another without interval and without cessation of movement. The characters of one scene moved off the stage before the eyes of the audience as the characters of the next scene moved on. Technical response to the staging appears in the frequency of processional exits. Similarly, for entrance of a new character after the opening of a scene, the walk from the door at the rear to the front of the stage is frequently covered by one of the characters on-stage calling attention to the approach of the new character. Much that would have to be introduced as expositional matter on a less mobile stage is presented by action. For example, Shakespeare conveys the progress of a battle by two or three short scenes, marked "Alarums and excursions," of men fighting across the stage. The variety of architecturally fixed acting spaces available without pause for scene change added to the dynamic effect to the eye. The characters moved in or out of the inner stage, appeared in the upper alcove or on the balcony, or at the side windows over the doors, with variety of movement and physical relationship. A part of the dramaturgy of Shakespeare and his fellows was the rhythm of the scenes. To put Shakespeare on a single level, to interrupt the flow of scenes for changes of set, or to cut short scenes from the play, makes the play seem lumbering and heavy. *King Lear* through the era of proscenium and curtain and realistically painted scenery was often called unstageable, a closet drama, in spite of the fact that Shakespeare in the maturity of his practical experience wrote it for the stage. But Komisarjevsky in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, with a stage stripped of scenery, variety of structural acting levels, and blackouts and spotlighting, released again the whirlwind force and metaphysical sense of evil with which *King Lear* must first have entered the theatre. The blackout and spotlight are the modern way of achieving the Elizabethan move-

ment, and actually intensify the effect; Shakespeare would know at once what to do with them.

One effect of the Elizabethan theatre was to produce a drama of concentration on the story and the characters with elimination of minor detail. Many scenes were unlocalized, but when, for clarity, the scene needed to be known, the minimum of attention was given it. When Rosalind announces, "Well, this is the forest of Arden," the audience did not imaginatively supply trees to the bare stage; their eyes followed the actors with little concern for the stage except as an acting space, and their attention was fixed on what happened to the characters emotionally, not where it happened. With the bare stage and the concentration on character went the development of a drama of the power of language, and since poetry is language at the height of expressiveness, of a great poetic drama. Again, it is rather commonly said that Shakespeare supplies the stage setting to the imagination by means of descriptive passages of poetry. To a degree he does, but with few concrete details; he does not so much set the stage as light the stage, supply the atmosphere, the essence only of the setting. "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" says Lorenzo to Jessica; Horatio and his comrades turn from their night of watching as "the morn, in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill"; Macbeth's castle "hath a pleasant seat" where "the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses." The chief function of poetry in drama is to convey emotional significance more adequately than is possible to realistic prose. The comparative absence of external physical interest threw Elizabethan drama inward upon profound emotional development which demanded poetry for expression. Simplicity of setting and the return of poetry, whether in verse or poetic prose, will inevitably be associated in the modern theatre.

The Elizabethan theatre was an intimate theatre. The elect of the audience sat in the first gallery around three sides of a stage only twenty-five or thirty feet away. The specifications for the Fortune Theatre, which was square, called for inside dimensions of fifty-five feet each way, with

the stage built out to the middle of the pit. The outside dimension was eighty feet, so the galleries were only ten or twelve feet deep. As the second and third galleries were not stepped back, they were further removed than the first gallery only by the additional height. The audience in the pit stood immediately around the stage, and the young-men-about-town who wanted to show off their clothes and manners sat on the edge of the stage itself. Complexity of plot and number of characters, of mood, and characterization could be projected to the audience, while magnitude and grandeur was achieved in the confined space by the power of poetry.

In contrast, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were presented in the open air on a stage facing a vast semicircle of rising tiers of seats built into the side of a hill. Greek drama originated in religious festivals and never lost its religious association. It was maintained as a great public spectacle for an entire city. The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens is estimated to have seated seventeen thousand persons, with the most remote members of the audience nearly three hundred feet from the stage. An intricate plot and a multitude of individually distinguished characters could never have been followed in such a theatre, and quick variations of mood and subtleties of character delineation could not have been projected. The Greek tragedies are compact and direct, unified in mood, and distinguished by immediate clarity of structure and character outline. However much their noble simplicity and sculptural grandeur is due to the Greek mind, no other kind of greatness would have been possible in the Greek theatre. The conditions of the theatre, of course, developed out of the Greek mind and social organization.

The first problem of such a theatre was projection to the audience. Greek drama was naturally highly conventional to start with because of its origin in religious rites, but certain conventions were maintained and developed for adjustment to the conditions of production. Facial expression and fine distinctions of make-up would be lost to a remote audience. The actors wore boldly modeled masks representing

the sex, age, rank, general character, and predominating emotional tone of the parts. The mouth was always widely open for projection of the voice and possibly the mask contributed something of the value of a megaphone. The masks were religious in origin, but come to be systematically typed for the range of dramaturgic needs. Conventionally symbolic costumes also helped to identify the parts. For dignity of appearance at so great a distance from the audience, the height of the tragic actor was raised over a foot and a half by the cothurnus, a thick-soled boot, and the onkos, a lofty headgear. His bulk was increased proportionately by padding. Elaborate physical activity would be impossible under such conditions. An acting art of powerful gesture undoubtedly developed.

The scenic background was a fixed architectural façade with three doors. The continuous presence on the stage of the chorus, an inheritance from the religious origin, created a tendency toward unity of time and place. The scenic background probably suggested the customary setting of the action before a temple or palace. As a religious tabu, violence or bloodshed was forbidden on the stage. As always, the dramatist of genius capitalized on his restrictions. Aeschylus constructed the *Agamemnon* for a sense of impending doom when the king on his return from Troy is received by Clytemnestra with ironic honor and ceremony within the doors of his home. By the action in front of the palace suspense is intensified for the horror which may be in preparation behind the closed doors. The death-cry of Agamemnon from within comes as a climax, followed again by the suspense of waiting for news of what has happened within. Through the forebodings and tremors of the Chorus of Argive Elders the audience is held in identification with all that occurs off-stage, again the dramatist utilizing the convention within which he works. The foreboding when a character leaves the stage, the tension for what may happen within, and the climactic effect of the cries of a victim, or of the horror of a witness entering to report what he has seen, were varied in effective use over and over. Commonly, as in the *Agamemnon*, the dead body was displayed

before the audience, either carried on the stage, or by means of the *ekkuklema*, a movable platform by which the result of interior action could be shown.

The Greek dramatist was limited to broad simple lines of plot and characterization, and necessarily relied on pure situation projected by precise construction and noble language to his audience. The result was a drama of clarity and moving power to people of all time. Perhaps the most masterly in construction of all the Greek tragedies, and the one which reveals most forcibly the gripping effect of pure situation, is Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. Oedipus stands before his people, in devotion to them relentlessly searching out the identity of the unknown man whose crimes must be punished to lift the divine displeasure from Thebes. With terrific irony, the track of his investigation leads step by step to himself. The skill of construction lies in the concealment from Oedipus of the gradual advance until the last key-piece reveals the awful truth, that he unwittingly has slain his father and married his own mother. The crisis is prepared when Jocasta, with fuller knowledge, foresees the end, and finding speech unavailing to restrain her husband and son, leaves the stage for eternal silence:

O woe is thee, poor wretch! With that last word
I leave thee, henceforth silent evermore.

When at last Oedipus himself foresees whither his questions lead, he unflinchingly demands the final answers. The question for the audience has passed from, Who is the man? to What will this man driving upon his doom with combined rashness and integrity of purpose do when the blow falls? When Oedipus knows the truth and rushes within the palace, the crisis has come and the audience waits in suspense lifted into awe by the Chorus. First comes the news of Jocasta's self-inflicted death, pathetic in lonely silence. Then swiftly the Messenger tells how Oedipus, great alike in rashness and integrity, has deprived himself of sight and pronounced banishment—the judgment decreed when the criminal was unknown—upon himself. The audience's question is answered, while with Oedipus's final appearance and main-

tenance of the right of his twofold self-imposed punishment, their awe is increased before inscrutable fate and the courage and strength of man to face it and endure. I have found no work of any period from ancient to modern of more assured immediacy and completeness of contact with students of today. In the years of teaching literature I have found them unfailingly gripped by the plot construction and deeply moved by the fate and nobility of King Oedipus.

Another drama even more highly conventionalized than that of the ancient Greeks is the Nō drama of Japan. The Nō drama was developed from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries and has been continuously produced since, until a few years ago at least, in the manner of the original Nō theatre. The plays have been made available to English readers with a helpful introduction on Nō production by Arthur Waley in *The Nō Plays of Japan*. The conventionalization of the Nō theatre is even more elaborate, fixed, and sophisticated than was that of the ancient Greek theatre. Certain conventions are possessed in common, the use of masks, the presence of a chorus, poetry, and song and dance. There is almost no element of realism in the Nō drama; reliance is completely upon formalized art for the projection of story, idea, and emotion. The square stage is open on three sides and is bare of illusionary scenery. All buildings, from palace to hovel, are represented by four posts covered with a roof. Costumes are gorgeous and elaborate, and peculiar to the theatre, not those of everyday life. The plays are written partly in prose and partly in verse. The lines are intoned or sung, the movements of the actors are formalized, and the climax of the play is danced by the principal actor. The climax may be led up to by subordinate dances. The chief function of the chorus, seated at one side of the stage, is to sing the actor's words for him when his dance movements would interfere with delivery. The musical accompaniment consists of three drums and a flute.

The Nō play follows an established pattern in certain respects. First comes the opening couplet, the purpose of which is to suggest the mood. Immediately follows the exposition, delivered in prose by the secondary actor. The

secondary actor is on his way to find the principal actor; he formally announces his name, origin, destination, and purpose of the journey, and the circumstances surrounding the principal actor. Some plays require only the two actors, or each may have one or more attendants. After the exposition, the secondary actor, probably with an attendant, walks about the stage while they recite the "song of travel," at the end of which arrival at the destination is announced. This portion of the play is introductory, preparing for the entrance of the principal actor. The play is carefully built in writing and in acting on the principle of three moods, of Introduction, Development, and Climax.

The Nō play is short, a one-act play, and its art is that of suggestion. The climactic action ordinarily is not presented directly, but is an action revived with its former intensity in the memory of a ghost, or of an aged man recalling his youth, and is presented in recital with miming and dancing. Life is thus presented in perspective, colored by a mood, and projecting an idea. The art of such a drama is necessarily one of outward simplification and inner subtlety. The heart of Nō, both its writing and acting, is expressed in the term *yugen*, defined by Mr. Waley as literally "what lies beneath the surface," or "the subtle as opposed to the obvious; the hint, as opposed to the statement." Remarks on the art of acting translated by Mr. Waley from Seami, one of the two writers who brought Nō to the height of its development, are curiously reminiscent of the instructions Shakespeare put in Hamlet's mouth for the players: "Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, the whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."—A revelation of the universality of the first principles of art.

Selecting for illustration *Kagekiyo*, one of the many Nō plays in which the emotional significance is as readily clear to an occidental as to a Japanese audience, the universal basic dramatic structure is immediately apparent under the extremely distinctive outward form. *Kagekiyo* the Passionate was a warrior-hero banished by the conquerors of the lord

for whom he fought. His daughter Hitomaru has grown to young womanhood, and having heard that he dwells in Hyuga in changed estate, she seeks him. Following upon the opening couplet, exposition, travel-song, and arrival in Hyuga, the Girl and Attendant come upon a blind beggar in his hut, Kagekiyo himself unknown to them. They inquire for Kagekiyo, the attack of the play, or beginning of the Development. He would not burden his daughter with such a relationship, and sends them away without revealing himself. The Girl learns the truth from a villager who accompanies her back to the hut and calls upon Kagekiyo by name. He would send his daughter away; in sadness, she asks one favor first, to hear the story of his high deeds in one of his great battles. He consents and lives again the strength and glory of a great episode, rendered in recitation and dance, the crisis of the play. At the climax he breaks off abruptly, his present state returns to him, and he sends his child away; in love she sought him out, in love he must send her from him—the resolution of the play. The Chorus concludes the play with the haunting lines:

“I stay,” he said; and she “I go.”
The sound of this word
Was all he kept of her,
Nor passed between them
Remembrance other.

After considering dramatic literature so closely integrated with established and elaborate conventions, those of the Elizabethan, the ancient Greek, and the Nō theatres, it seems strange to find one of the greatest masterpieces of all dramatic literature existing in isolation from any known theatrical background. *The Book of Job* is the only drama included in the literature of the ancient Hebrews preserved to us in the Old Testament. There is no evidence of the existence of a Hebrew theatre or any body of drama. Ancient drama characteristically arose from religious rites, and it is probable that the long conflict against pagan ritual was unfavorable to theatrical development. The authorship of *The Book of Job* is unknown. It is reasonably certain that

two authors were involved, one having expanded the original work. Even the period of composition is uncertain, but evidence points to the earlier half of the fourth century B.C. There are sufficient resemblances of form to that of Greek tragedy to suggest that the author of *Job* was influenced by knowledge of the Greek theatre. Direct relation to the words of both Aeschylus and Euripides has been suggested, but the resemblances are so general as to be quite undeterminative.

Whatever its structural origin, *Job* represents dramatic form adapted to expression of the characteristic Hebrew genius for spiritual exploration. It is of special interest to the theatre today because it is a drama entirely of inner conflict, drama as understood by Andreyev, a struggle of intellectual revaluation attended by tragic depths of anguish and triumphant exaltation. Over two thousand years ago the author of the book of *Job* was meeting the problem of expressionism in drama, but in a manner strikingly different. Expressionistic drama has tended to be cold in its intellectuality; *Job* is a drama of the most profound and complete emotional identification. Expressionism is complex, indirect, and symbolical in method; *Job* is simple, direct, and realistic, except in so far as Job is a symbol of all men confronting the problem of evil; expressionism has commonly resorted to the excitement of external theatricality and violence under the device of allegorical action, while the author of *Job* depended upon the passionate intensity of the mental conflict alone.

The entire external action of *Job* is contained in a Prologue and an Epilogue; the rest is dialogue, and direct conflict of minds. In the narrative Prologue the situation for the attack is created: Job, a man upright and righteous in all his ways, has been cast down from prosperity to the depths of misery, with loss of all his property, all his children, and his home, and at last sorely afflicted with boils. Three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to sit with him and comfort him. To their amazement and indignation, Job not only bewails his lot, but questions the rightness of God in so afflicting him. It is the old philosophical and

religious question of how to harmonize the existence of unmerited suffering with the idea of an omnipotent and just and beneficent God, made warm and living by the immediate misery and anguish of Job. Job is confronted in his friends by the traditional view of suffering as a punishment for wrongdoing, against which he asserts his innocence; more, he defies God even to death, yet he will not violate the integrity of his consciousness by confessing sins of which he is unaware:

Behold he will slay me; I have no hope:
Nevertheless I will maintain my ways before him.

Structurally, the rising action of the drama proceeds on a plan of three sets of speeches. After Job has first spoken, three times each of the three friends addresses Job and is answered by Job in turn. Job then utters his final lament and protestation of integrity. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar together represent a single force, the traditional view which the author discards, that happiness and suffering are proportioned to merit in this world. Through them the author presents the best thought of his day and presents it nobly, but as is intended, their arguments fall flat for the reader before the living disproof of Job. The three men are individualized, and are presented with psychologically sound emotional progression. Eliphaz is the man of deepest feeling, Bildad the most harsh, Zophar of coarsest fibre. From sympathetic intention to administer comfort and lead Job to his own salvation through confession and repentance, they are drawn into argument by Job's unexpected response, and argument leads to anger, gross accusation, and bitterness. The inapplicable arguments increase the torment of one already sorely afflicted, and their false accusations arouse Job in turn to anger and passionate vindication. The lines are filled with internal stage directions, eyes that flash, the shaking head, the raised voice, speech that cannot be restrained. Speech shifts and varies with impatience, vexation, piteous appeal, and defiance. There is withering sarcasm from Job:

No doubt but ye are the people,
And wisdom shall die with you.

Eliphaz heavily attempts sarcasm in return:

Should a wise man make answer with vain knowledge,
And fill himself with the east wind?

Through it all runs the white flame of Job's passion, and one knows that his deepest anguish is his sense of isolation from God. In this way drama is made of intellectual conflict.

After Job's climactic speech, a new character enters the dialogue, a young man, Elihu, who has been standing by in growing impatience at the impotence of his elders to convince Job. The author's characteristic satirical touch is upon the young man's introduction of himself:

They have not a word to say
And shall I wait, because they speak not.

I also will show mine opinion,
For I am full of words.

To the arguments of his elders he adds the suggestion of possible salutary effect of suffering in ways incomprehensible to man. He does not accuse Job of crude sins, as the others have done, but of pride. His real contribution is a magnificent picturing of the power and wonder of God as so beyond human comprehension as to be beyond question. Then Jehovah speaks directly to Job out of the whirlwind, sweeping aside all that has gone before:

Who is this that darkeneth counsel
By words without knowledge?

What follows is a splendor of poetry unequaled in all literature. The author of *The Book of Job* issued to himself a tremendous challenge which he was able to meet. In the speech of Jehovah he offered no answer to Job's question, but by the power of poetry he achieved the effect of direct revelation of what Elihu had offered as argument: God does not argue, in his glory he himself is the only answer. Job responds to Jehovah with that humility in which, by loss of the self in something infinitely larger than the self, lies exaltation. Here the drama as drama of the spirit is resolved.

The Epilogue returns to the folk-tale frame, and Jehovah "blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning, with livestock, and sons and daughters, and fulness of years."

The speech of Elihu is the interpolation of the second author, but shows complete artistic comprehension of the purpose of the original author, and contributes to its fulfilment. Elihu's speech is, in fact, the realization of the first half of Job's final statement:

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth thee.

The three old men spoke only things of God which were untrue; Elihu spoke that which was true, but reached only Job's mind. Then with the voice of Jehovah out of the whirlwind, Job felt as inner experience the truth of which he had heard. The drama of *Job* with the speech of Elihu added shows with psychological exactness the course of intellectual conflict, the struggle for truth: first, the revaluation and rejections, then the new perception with the mind, and finally out of the period of concentration, the stirring of the emotions which gives the conviction of reality to perception. As Keats wrote in one of his letters, "Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses." Structurally, the speech of Elihu prepares for and gives a needed rise to the crisis of the voice of Jehovah from the whirlwind.

There is no certainty that *Job* was ever produced in its own time. That *Job* is not only a great poem in dramatic form, but belongs to the theatre, was proved by Stuart Walker's production in the Portmanteau Theatre. There is another stage arrangement of undoubted beauty contrived by Dr. Horace M. Kallen. Dr. Kallen added elaboration of scenic effect and approximation to Greek form with the introduction of a chorus by means of transpositions and divisions of the speeches. The desirability of such a treatment is questionable. The chorus in Greek drama represented the state character of religion and the identification of the fate of the protagonist with a people. The author of *Job* focused

completely on the individual soul struggle. If influenced in his form by Greek tragedy, he rejected the chorus for his purpose. Stuart Walker's production was a simple and direct presentation of the text as it stands, with the necessary clearing up of a textual confusion by which Zophar's third speech seems to have been inserted into Job's last speech. The stage was small, framed in a low arch flanked by two arched niches. The lights came up on the niches, and two angel-like figures, robed one in red and one in blue as I remember them, were revealed and in alternation spoke the Prologue, later the Epilogue. The niches were darkened and the light came up in the central arch on Job and his friends seated on the ground. The only scenic effect was the grouping against the background of clear desert light of the figures robed in rich solid colors, like a Tissot Biblical painting. The actors were selected for fine voices of contrasting timbre. The implications in the text for elocutionary variety and dramatic gesture and expression were realized to the full. Variety of pictorial interest in the grouping was maintained by limited, passion-propelled movements such as rising to the feet, walking a few paces and return, the head bowed to the knees. The effect was one of the most beautiful and absorbing experiences I have known in the theatre.

The Book of Job is a dramatic form isolated from any known theatrical tradition. There are many other historical theatres than those already discussed, each with its distinctive dramas, some of which exercised important influence on the course of European drama, and all of interest to the writer of plays today. In the Orient there were the romantic and beautiful Hindu drama of the fourth to the eighth centuries A.D., and the Chinese drama of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, resembling in some of its conventions the Japanese Nō drama, but distinctive in spirit and many of its formal aspects. Both the old Hindu and Chinese dramas exist in modified form to the present day. Roman drama, derived from the Greek, developed fresh material and conventions, and strongly influenced the theatres of the Renaissance. The religious drama of the mystery and miracle plays, presenting Scriptural stories or episodes in the lives of the saints, arose

in medieval Europe independently of Greek and Roman influences. A distinctive development of the Continental mystery play was the multiple stage, a construction of several fixed scenes, from one to another of which the actors moved for change of locale. The famous Valenciennes miniature shows a long open platform, an unlocalized acting space, behind which are ranged *mansions*, as they were called, representing Nazareth, Jerusalem, a temple, a castle, the House of Bishops, the Golden Gate, and the Mouth of Hell. Allegory as a dramatic mode developed a little later in the morality plays.

One of the theatres most strange to modern conceptions, but one of the most influential on subsequent drama, was the *commedia dell' arte*, a popular form which flourished in Italy and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *commedia dell' arte* was an entirely non-literary theatre. The actors were provided with a scenario upon which they improvised the dialogue and comic horse-play. The plays were written around a fixed set of character types, bearing the same name from play to play, as Pantalone, a doddering old man always a comic butt, the deceived husband or the outwitted father; Pulcinella, the shrewd, cruel rascal who later became the Punch of Punch and Judy shows; Harlequin and Columbine who have lived on in many a modern fantasy. Each character was distinguished by a mask and conventional costume. An actor specialized in a single part for his entire career, and developed his own repertory of set speeches as a basis for the more standardized situations. As the *commedia dell' arte* grew in favor the companies were received into the elaborate Renaissance theatres and spectacle became a part of the show, but their art had been developed by itinerant companies playing in the market place or town square, and they could hold their audience on bare boards laid on trestles. Although the *commedia dell' arte* created no literature, it inevitably developed a very high art of acting and of basic plot construction, and its sharply etched characterizations and well-devised plots were absorbed into literary drama.

Out of the manifold forms which the theatre has assumed

in the past, one thing before all else appears—that the stage is fundamentally a space for acting. A story, the power of language, and actors to speak the lines, with a platform to speak them from, are all that is necessary to have a play. The play comes first, the theatre is its instrument. Conventions, whatever their origin, by the time they become purely theatrical are devices to facilitate telling the story in its essence, a short-cut to the heart of the story. It is evident that realism is not the norm, or an end, in the theatre, but is itself one of many conventions, a device by which the stage itself can dispose of some matters and free the dramatist to his story. Scenery, whether realistic, suggestive, or symbolical, is secondary, but may be a most useful adjunct to the theatre. The dramatist should know his theatre well enough to use its facilities, and then not be too humble before his collaborators in the theatre. There has been some tendency in this mechanical and material age for the work of the scene designer and the stage carpenter to be overstressed, and for those who handle the theatrical effects, producers, directors, and stage managers, to assume or have assigned to them too much authority. The first business of staging is to project what the dramatist has to say.

Acceptance of unrealistic stage conventions has often been ascribed to naïveness. Elizabethan staging was thought of as crude, and the Elizabethans capable of finding illusion in it because they were unsophisticated and therefore more imaginative than modern people. No convention which is clear places a strain upon the imagination; it simply directs the imagination from what is unessential to what is essential. The Elizabethans did not see trees instead of a bare stage; they saw neither trees nor stage because their attention was concentrated on the characters. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* came along recently and showed us what the essentials of drama in the theatre are, and a thoroughly sophisticated audience found it no strain upon their imaginations to accept the space around a table on one side of the stage as the interior of a house, and the space around a table on the other side as the interior of a house across the way, when a combination stage manager, narrator, and commentator told

them that was what they were. The audience did not imagine walls because their attention was concentrated on something more real than wood and plaster, or canvas and paint—on the experience of the people who dwelt in those houses. When a boy and girl talked to each other from the tops of two stepladders, the audience did not look at the ladders because they were listening to the boy and girl talk as they would on a moonlit evening from the upstairs windows of houses next door. If someone misses scenery it is not for lack of imagination, but because he is interested in scenery, or because the dramatist did not provide a suitable or an adequate center of interest for absence of scenery.

The essential is that the convention be clear, either by established and familiar use, or by the way in which the dramatist introduces the fresh convention for his own play. For *Our Town* the audience found themselves seated before a raised curtain and an empty stage. After a time a stage manager strolled on, placed a few chairs and tables, walked over and leaned against the side of the proscenium arch, smoked his pipe, and in friendly wise explained to the audience the lay-out of "Our Town." By the time the actors entered the audience was prepared for the mode of the play.

A convention in the theatre is simply any manner of presentation whatsoever consistently maintained and thus established in the minds of the audience as a means of communication. If in a drama in which masks were worn one of the masks were to fall off, it would produce the same reaction from the audience as an actor losing his mustache from a realistic make-up. At the University of Michigan I once attended a play produced as a class exercise in which for economy the convention of the mystery-play *mansions* or the Nō-play houses of four poles and a roof was used. There was the framework of a house on the stage with a frame for a door—no walls. Action took place both within and without the house. In the middle of the play one of the actors made the mistake of walking out of the house through the wall space instead of the door space. The convention was established early in the play, and the audience gasped. The reaction of the audience was not due to any

imaginative sense of someone crashing through a wall, but to the violation of the convention. If the convention had been one step simpler, the four posts and a roof with no differentiation of the spaces, that would have been accepted and the door would have been wherever the actor chose to pass under the roof.

The best theatre for the dramatist is the theatre most rich and flexible in conventions, and that is the theatre of today, for in the theatre of today historical knowledge of the theatres of the past joins hands with fresh needs and stimuli. In the Russian constructivist stage the Greek and Elizabethan pure acting spaces and levels meet the modern mechanical and structural sense; O'Neill applies the Greek and Japanese use of masks to psychological revelation; the soliloquies of Hamlet are expanded and made psychologically more realistic; in the bare stage of *Our Town* acting is intensified as in the *commedia dell' arte*, and a Chinese stage hand, Greek chorus, and the Prologue of many theatres are combined in a single figure, who is surprisingly realistic; *The Green Pastures* is a modern mystery play; in Auden's and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* the Greek chorus reappears as radio announcer; and the Elizabethan flow of scene has been introduced by means of blackouts in innumerable plays. Such a theatre carries its danger as well as opportunity; the dramatist must recognize and be able to use the discipline as well as the freedom of knowledge.

XIV. FUNCTIONS AND VALUES

CLARITY of purpose is one of the first responsibilities of the dramatist if he is to obtain unity and decisiveness of effect with his play. He must know and understand what he is trying to do. There are classifications for drama on the basis of method, as realism and expressionism, of material, as domestic drama and high and low comedy, and in terms of effect and function. Any convenient division of drama may be further subdivided, and ultimately each drama is individual in its purpose, but there are certain broad divisions which are extremely helpful. A dramatist will direct his work with more clarity by an understanding of the distinguishing functions and values of such divisions as social drama, comedy, and tragedy.

The classical division for all drama was into tragedy and comedy. In the new theatre of the Renaissance, with its freedom and experimentation, such variety developed as to lead to the labored attempts at full classification at which Shakespeare poked fun in the speech of Polonius: "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral." In Greek usage, as it appears in Aristotle's *Poetics*, tragedy was distinguished from comedy not by an unhappy resolution, but by seriousness and dignity of material and treatment. A tragedy always involved suffering, but might move from happiness to misery, as in *King Oedipus*, or from misery to release, as in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Comedy was designed to induce laughter. In Elizabethan usage, comedy and tragedy were distinguished more superficially on the basis of a happy or unhappy ending, which led to the anomaly of plays so serious in mood as *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* being designated as comedies. In modern usage the term tragedy is reserved for drama distinguished both

by the material and treatment and catastrophic conclusion, comedy for lightness of tone as well as the happy ending, and drama of the middle ground is distinguished as social drama. Shakespeare's serious comedies, as they are sometimes called, are essentially social dramas.

Social drama is drama serious in material and treatment in which the outcome may be either happy or unhappy according to the logic of events. This immediately implies that the force opposing the happiness of the protagonist is less ultimate than in tragedy, which is controlled by a feeling of inevitability in the outcome. The force in pure tragedy is fate, or power beyond human control; tragedy deals with the element of evil and suffering in human experience which is inescapable in life as such. The destructive forces of social drama are social, created by man, and therefore can be altered by man. It follows that the effect of social drama is corrective; its function is to arouse society to a consciousness of its ills and errors and to create the impulse to do something about them. The sweep of evil in tragedy is greater than in social drama, but tragedy is designed to create immediate emotional release within itself, a mood of exaltation. Social drama may properly sometimes end upon a painful emotional effect, with the function of leaving an irritant in the mind which will drive to action for release.

There are of course many divisions of effect in social drama, and it can verge upon pure comedy on the one hand and pure tragedy on the other. A play may send the audience out of the theatre with the feeling, something has got to be done about this immediately, or the effect may be to provoke thought, to search for the causes and solution for the problem. The influence of Galsworthy's drama *Justice* is said actually to have been directly responsible for change in English judicial procedure; more often the effect is to open the minds and sympathies of the audience to an understanding responsiveness to problems as they come before them in the future. Thought provoking as contrasted to emotion stirring social drama is especially likely to be on the side of comedy, as in so many of Shaw's plays. On the other hand, Hauptmann's *The Weavers* verges upon tragedy

because of the overwhelming magnitude of the social forces involved in proportion to the strength of the weavers, and the emotional release gained by the weavers in the otherwise futile wrecking of the manufacturer's house and smashing of the power looms. But the audience realizes that the evil is social, and the emotional release is not enough; it is a problem for change. Social drama is a broader term than problem play. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in its emphasis upon the source of the evil is a problem play; *Hedda Gabler*, with its emphasis on psychological interest in the character, is not. However, although the immediate cause of Hedda's end lies within her own character, the emotional effect is not that of tragic inevitability because Ibsen reveals social causes for her character. If her character had been inherent instead of conditioned, it would have constituted a fate and have been material for tragedy—that is, if the character in addition had possessed sufficient strength and dignity. The emotional effect of *Hedda Gabler* is not pitched very high; it is an intensely interesting and thought-provoking play.

Three things are necessary to success in writing social drama for corrective effect: concentration of direction of attack, restraint, and hope of possible change. In Elmer Rice's *We, the People*, for example, the total effect of the play has much less force than one would expect from the strength of the scenes individually. Mr. Rice's indignation against so many social evils boiled over into the one play that his fire is scattered and brings down no game. Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* and Leopold Atlas's *But for the Grace of God* contrast instructively. The material is similar, the problem the same—the crime-breeding effects of boys growing up in slums. Mr. Atlas heaps so many catastrophes upon the family presented that the sensibilities become numbed before the end of the play, and the audience goes out from the theatre actually feeling the problem less intensely than from *Dead End* where fewer and less smashing blows are struck. Also in *But for the Grace of God* the picture is so totally and heavily dark as to give the audience no feeling of a foundation from which to work or anything to work toward. In *Dead End* there is a norm in Gimpty, the young

architect, and Drina, Tommy's older sister, and a sense of hope in the unredeemed vitality of the street urchins themselves. In the name of sincerity and truth to life it may be protested that things are as bad as in *But for the Grace of God*, and that everything that happens in the play could happen to such a family in such circumstances, but art is a simplification in detail of life, and implies restraint and selection of the significant, and arrangement with the juxtaposition of light to dark which throws one into relief against the other. *But for the Grace of God* was not only too painful to succeed commercially, but too painful for effectiveness in the purpose of social drama, even if the public could have been forced to see it. One could only admire the evident sincerity and purpose of the author and hope that next time his skill in writing would be guided by balance and restraint.

Another problem in social drama is not to be led astray by the freedom for either a happy or unhappy ending. The logic of events must be to a degree typical as well as particular. If the weight of destructive forces becomes so heavy in the course of the play that an unhappy outcome will seem more true to life in general, it is usually demanded even though some special turn of circumstance could still save the situation. Such a happy resolution seems forced, and creates a sense of irritation at the feelings having been harrowed for nothing. In other words, the happy ending would make the play sentimental, giving the audience the feeling that the author had worked up emotion for its own sake rather than to reveal the essential truth of his material. Similarly, if the course of the play does not adequately justify an unhappy ending, such an ending is a sentimental playing upon the emotions, and leaves the audience either cold or rebellious.

Closely allied to social drama, or a division of it, is propagandistic drama, which has risen to special prominence in the last few years. Exactly what is the line between propagandistic and social drama is a much-debated question. The basic distinction is easy to state: it is a matter of purpose. A propagandistic play is written with the attitude that its function as a work of art—the purpose of which is to reveal

truth, let the chips fall where they may—is secondary to the purpose of converting the audience to a belief or cause, or arousing them to action in that cause. As art, a drama is an end in itself, but as propaganda it is an instrument, a weapon, in a cause. The creation of a pure work of art is a process of thinking, an act of contemplation on the part of the artist. The writer of the propagandistic play has closed his thought and turned to action; the play is his blow in a conflict. Ibsen made clear what is meant by social drama when he said that drama should be not only revelative, but redemptive; he accepted the purpose of pure art to reveal truth, but distinguished as to what truths he considered worth revealing. When he added that to be redemptive, drama must be truly revelative, he at once foreshadowed the propagandistic attitude and laid down a precept for it. In actual practice, since plays are written by men, not by abstract artists or abstract propagandists, the two types merge into one another. The most that can be said is that propagandistic drama shows certain tendencies. The most pronounced distinction is that the propagandistic drama offers a course of action, specific solution to the social problem presented. In a social play the problem is general, but the solution is individual, while the propagandistic resolution is intended for general application. In many marriages the social problem of *A Doll's House* exists, but there is no implication in the play that women generally whose personalities have been repressed by marriage should leave their husbands; that solution for Nora grew out of individual character and circumstances. If Nora had made her decision in response to a call from an organizer of the Association for Promotion of Wives Walking Out on Their Husbands, the play would have been propagandistic.

Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* contains the material of social drama in the scenes revealing the denial by low wages of simple human rights in the lives of the individual workers. At a taxi-drivers' meeting a union leader is trying to dissuade the drivers from striking; communistic leadership persuades them to strike. The scenes in the workers' private lives do not prove that the drivers should strike; they only

reveal that a condition exists which needs to be changed. But by the juxtaposition, the emotional force of the suffering revealed is applied to the demand for a strike. Along with this, the union leader is created as a fat, smooth-talker backed by gunmen, and those agitating for a strike are presented sympathetically. The strike is precipitated by gangster tactics from the union. The play has no validity as argument and no appeal to the mind outside of the illustrative scenes, but as an instrument to action it is exceedingly effective. Before there can be action, thought must end in a decision. What such a play as *Waiting for Lefty* amounts to is that the author has decided for communism as the right leadership for labor as against labor unions; he knows what he believes in and is ready for action. He does not ask for thought from his audience, but appeals to them as a leader, stirring them to have confidence and follow him. *Waiting for Lefty* is perhaps now the most famous American propagandistic play, and serves well to illustrate the pure type. One question arises in one's mind: is the presentation fair? Other propagandistic plays have been written, *Stevedore* for example, in which it is the union leader who is the manly, upstanding fellow, the friend of the workingman. *Waiting for Lefty* was inspired by a specific and localized situation, pressure for a taxi-drivers' strike in New York City. The presentation is justified for its immediate purpose if true to the immediate situation, but if unrepresentative of a broader situation, is limited in its proper functioning.

Because, as has been suggested, people of artistic as well as doctrinal impulses write propagandistic plays, the type constantly tends to approximate pure social drama in effect, particularly in the long play, where the fable bulks larger in proportion to the moral. *Stevedore* and *They Shall Not Die* are such plays. The author in each case evidently became more absorbed in social truth than in doctrinal truth. The plays are rich in human experience and character. The doctrinal tag of the propagandistic play is there, and in *They Shall Not Die* the immediate and specific occasion for action, but in those plays the organizational affiliations of

the leaders are nearly lost in their individual characters as men fighting injustice and oppression.

Propagandistic drama is now identified in most minds with the proletarian theme, and is thought of as new. Propaganda has appeared frequently, however, on the American stage throughout its history, from anti-British plays at the time of the Revolution, through the numerous anti-slavery plays and the lurid depictions of the dangers of wine, women, and gambling. The current movement originated in Russia when the Soviet régime undertook the direction of drama to immediate practical ends. There drama has been applied not only to propagation of doctrines but to educational propaganda of a non-controversial kind. In one play, for example, presented in furtherance of the transformation of the agricultural system, the gasoline tractor was really the hero. The Russians have learned how to make education exciting in the theatre. The screen has been even more widely used in this way, and is better adapted to the purpose. An American picture of the type, which turned out to be one of the best entertainments of the year, was the government-made picture of flood control. Cinematic techniques have been applied to the stage in Russia for educational purposes, the influence of which appears in *The Living Newspaper* productions developed by our Federal Theatre. The Russian propagandistic drama has directly created the Labor Stage movement in this country, but its influence has gone beyond propagandistic drama in a broadening of the subject matter of the general theatre, and the contribution of dynamic techniques. From Russia, largely, have come the use of mass chants, rhythmic repetitions, the dynamic use of levels, and the compression into the stage with spotlighting and blackouts of simultaneous flashes from many scenes, all techniques for dramatizing mass ideas and forces.

The justification of propagandistic drama is a constant source of controversy. Pure art is the revelation of the many facets of human experience, and its function is to broaden the perceptions and deepen the emotions. The propagandist may feel sure that his doctrine is truth, but equally competent people may disagree with him. That poverty exists and

has evil effects on human life is a non-controversial truth, but one of which we need to be made more intensely aware. Any solution to poverty is controversial, a subject for scientific investigation and argument, not for revelation. But there is no reason why the theatre should be reserved for pure art. Thought must lead to decision and decision to action before evils can be corrected. Propagandistic drama is combat. There are good fights to be fought, and the theatre is a fair field. The protest against propagandistic drama is too often merely a protest against drama the speaker disagrees with. The theatre is open to all. Propaganda in the theatre if disagreed with can be met in the same forum.

Propagandistic drama, however, imposes a heavy moral obligation; sincerity is not enough, but full consideration before presuming to use the power of the theatre, and fair fighting, with balanced representation. The chief necessity for effectiveness, beyond the usual technical demands, happens also to be the essential to pure art—warmth and richness of human content which gives emotional force. Because of this, some dramas written with propagandistic purpose may live on as art after the controversy is dead and the doctrine recognized only by scholars. Service to a cause is not, as some partisans of today would have it, a necessary ingredient in art of importance, nor does zeal for a cause in itself create art. But artists are men living in society, and zeal for a cause has often been the energization which released and drove the artist in the man to creation.

A fierce corrective passion is necessary for the creation and functioning of powerful social drama. But life cannot always be lived at that pitch. There are times when we need to forget the weight and weary burden of the world, and a sense of humor is a saving grace in the midst of seriousness. Comedy is a point of view, an eye for the incongruities of things, which somehow produces a response of delight and laughter wherever it may be found. Such incongruities exist even in matters of utmost seriousness or of moral question. It was something of a *tour de force*, but Shaw in *A Doctor's Dilemma* made comedy of the deathbed scene of a man who

was not an unsympathetic character, whom we would rather have seen live than die. Ethically, it is permissible in comedy to experience pleasure in the contemplation of conduct from a moral point of view to be condemned. Sir John Falstaff was a reprobate, a liar, a swindler, a thief, a lecher, a drunkard, and a man without honor, yet we delight in the incongruities between his conduct and conventional morality. The point of view is simply detached from all possibility of moral disturbance, and as a result there is freedom for a time from sense of strain and struggle. The moral incongruities either in the low comedy of *Henry IV* or the high comedy of *The Way of the World* and *The Man of Mode* not only give pleasure in themselves but establish a relaxation to the broader field of enjoyment of Falstaff's jests and merry-making, and the zest for the difficulties of intrigue and the encounters of wit in the Restoration plays. We cannot always be doing something about those things which need to be changed. There are times when the moral or the reformatory point of view is a dissipation of energy, and the periods of detachment through comedy give refreshment, and also balance, when the time comes to reattack the problems of life.

The moral freedom of comedy, however, may be taken unfair advantage of. The perception of an incongruity between the conduct of a character and a norm in life produces the pleasure of comedy, but an incongruity between the degree of risqué frankness in a play and what is customary in the theatre at the period is not a legitimate comedy effect, although it may be theatrically successful. It merely produces a slight shock in the audience, a shade of hysteria so faint as hardly to be distinguished as such, but which makes it easy to precipitate the audience into laughter. With a few well-distributed shocks, the dramatist can extract from the audience more following laughs than his material deserves. Good plays as *Private Lives* and *Design for Living* are, I suspect that they seemed a little wittier on their first appearance in the theatre than they are because Mr. Coward in each dared to go a little farther in the direction of the risqué than his contemporaries. It must also be re-

membered that comedy ceases to be comedy if the emotions of the audience are engaged in sympathetic identification with vicious impulses, for the enjoyment of incongruity arises from detachment. And finally, the field of moral question is but a limited area of the breadth of opportunities for comedy.

Comedy furnishes recreation and renewal of strength for seriousness, but it is far more integral to life than that. Mistress Page cried,

We'll have a proof, by that which we will do,
Wives may be merry, and yet honest too.

And Sir Toby challenged Malvolio, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" Shakespeare had a way of casualness with profundities. The Merry Wife of Windsor in a jest, and Sir Toby in his cups, delivered an ethical theory of comedy—if we remember that the virtue of Malvolio was that Puritanical virtue which censored bear-baiting not because the sport gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Merriment and joyousness, like beauty, are ends in themselves, a positive good. The end of social drama should not be that an evil shall cease to exist, but that life may be freed for the enjoyment of its riches. Comedy is an immediate assertion of freedom of spirit.

The range of comedy is wide, from farce to high romance. There is a story of the dramatist, Pinero, that when asked to define comedy he answered, a comedy is a farce that was successful. The reply was cynically witty, but misleading. Farce is distinguished from the higher levels of comedy by its lack of characterization and essential truth to life; it is an elaboration of laughter-provoking devices for the sake only of laughter, without warmth of human interest or revelation of life. If the laughter is healthy, it is a good in itself, and the farce which does no more than add some hours of merriment to the world is not a thing to be despised. On the other hand, one of the easy roads to laughter for farce is the heaping of embarrassments upon some rather futile character, and such laughter tends to become raucous and

harsh. *Three Men on a Horse* depended too much upon that appeal, and its huge box-office success is hardly a credit to the public which responded so heartily. Another harsh appeal to which farce is too easily disposed is that of displaying rather innocuous characters to the ridicule of the audience, a prominent element in *You Can't Take It with You*. The characters are not themselves embarrassed in the play, but members of the audience of even moderate sensitivity are liable to be uncomfortable for them. People of less sensitivity enjoy a feeling of superiority before inferior people.

The value of farce is like that of melodrama, it is light entertainment. In melodrama, characterization and truth of life are subordinated to the development of plot thrills as an end in themselves. Melodrama exists today almost solely in the form of the "mystery thriller." This type of play is related to tragedy in the seriousness of events, since murder is usually the business the plot is about, and is akin to comedy in that a happy ending is usually in order—the mystery is solved, the murderer apprehended, and at least the characters the audience cares most about are saved. In its function, it belongs with farce. For some reason the mystery thriller receives little countenance on Broadway. The critics seem embarrassed by the conventionalities and unrealities of the type, and the New York audience seems afraid of being thought unsophisticated if it should enjoy a thriller. The sophisticated London audience delights in them with self-amused connoisseurship. In the meantime, the New Yorkers accept far greater conventionality and unreality in farce with enthusiasm, and when the best of the English thrillers are imported, give them short runs, even to so brilliant a play as Barré Lyndon's *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*. The thriller in good hands is capable of some intellectual content above farce, and deserves a better future in this country. *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* is a thriller at its best, a thoroughly sophisticated play free from crude sensationalism, with a light comedy touch, psychological interest, and human warmth as well as thrills, and a technical excellence in construction worth study.

It is a curious circumstance that comedy early in its his-

tory, as seen in the comedies of Aristophanes, mingled farce, the lightest phase of comedy, with satire, which is one of its possible serious aspects. Satire, which holds up to ridicule conduct, beliefs, or institutions disapproved of by the author, may be seriously corrective in purpose, and in such case is intermediate between pure comedy and social drama. The extravagances of farce may be a useful instrument to such an end, and are frequent in the social satires of Ben Jonson and Molière as well as of Aristophanes. The tone of satire may become so savage with corrective zeal as in Jonson's *Volpone* or Molière's *Tartuffe* as almost to lose the mood which we ordinarily associate with comedy. Shaw's social satires are for the most part coldly intellectual, his sharp thrusts delivered with urbanity; Maxwell Anderson's *Both Your Houses* is an example of genial satire, with friendliness toward the individual while he reveals the evils in which he is involved. In the Labor Stage revue, *Pins and Needles*, and Kaufman and Ryskind's musical comedy, *Of Thee I Sing*, we find satire which is not so much corrective in intention as a product of a healthy exuberance and freedom of spirit playing about subjects which at another time are considered seriously. Such satire is most close to pure comedy.

The corrective function of satire is important and should be understood. In general, ridicule, as Addison and Steele recognized when they launched *The Spectator*, is more effective against follies than vices, and where self-esteem rather than self-interest is involved. There may be considerable emotional satisfaction to the audience in having dictators made to look ridiculous, or the logical absurdities of war or of capitalistic greed revealed, but it will not stop any of those things; it is only a relief from taking them seriously and even runs the danger of making them seem less important. But if the members of the audience themselves are identified, not too harshly, with follies portrayed upon the stage, they may be moved to change. Unfortunately, the audience is desperately inclined to think what a good hit the preacher took at Neighbor Jones today. Although some follies can be laughed out of countenance, the corrective

value of satire tends to be exaggerated. In one way or another, a good deal of satire operates only as an ego-expansion. Clare Boothe's *The Women*, for example, pleases men because it makes them feel morally superior to women, and pleases women by giving them vicarious experience of a degree of cattiness they are seldom able to achieve under impromptu circumstances of actual social life. The value of such a play to its author and producers is obvious, its value to society is doubtful.

In the theatre of today we often hear the term farce-comedy. In such a play there is the exaggeration of situation of farce, but it is in association with warmth of characterization. In such a play, the characters, in harmony with the situations, are exaggerated, but as an intensification of a living reality. *Boy Meets Girl* is a fine example. The two scenario writers embody a spirit of eternal boyhood, they are grown-up Katzenjammer Kids. The audience laughs with as well as at them, and experiences a healthy release in identification with their glorious irresponsibility, their small-boy vindictiveness toward pomposity, their generosity of impulse toward helplessness. Susie, with her calm and gentle acceptance of nature and childlike completeness of logicity which confounds conventional thinking, is a heroine at once ridiculous, pathetic, endearing, and a little awe-inspiring. The play starts from the characters exaggerated beyond life as premises, and then pursues developments wherever they may lead with the touch of mad logicity and energy, the exuberance of conviction, which makes this type of play so invigorating in the theatre. *She Loves Me Not*, a few years ago, was another high-light in this dramatic mode almost peculiar to American talent.

Pure comedy at its highest and richest level is only secondarily a matter of laughter. Man is in part a creature of circumstance, subject to forces beyond his control, to fate; he is also a creature of will molding his own destiny. Each view of man is a part of the total truth of life; one is isolated and purified in tragedy, the other in comedy. Comedy presents the human will in its freedom and power to achieve its ends, and the happy ending is integral to the truth of life

which is its concern. Farce produces merriment, and the laughter of satire may be bitter. Pure comedy often deals in happiness that lies too deep for laughter, but when laughter comes it is the laughter of joyousness, an overflow of freedom of spirit in a good world. The struggles of comedy may be serious, but they are met in a spirit of vitality; defeat would not bring despair, and in the meantime there is zest in the struggle, and expectation of conquest is high. Such comedy is full-bodied in its characterizations, warm with life, and deeply revealing of truth.

The Elizabethan period, with its sense of a brave new world, contributed most liberally to the history of drama with comedy at its best. The Elizabethans were capable of facing problems of depth and seriousness in high spirits. Rosalind banished in the Forest of Arden delights us with the glow and sparkle of her wit, and Viola pining for Orsino's love delivers his messages to Olivia with irrepressible gallantry. It is an interesting reflection on the contemporary spirit that in the Mercury Theatre's revival of Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* the romantic element is minimized and the play practically reduced to farce. The result is merry enough, but without the ethical invigoration, the rich characterization, and the tenderness of Dekker's great comedy. There has been a sparseness both of pure comedy and pure tragedy in the contemporary theatre. Our dramatists when not writing with aroused social consciousness have tended to escape into drama which touches life but lightly. There are notable exceptions. In *The White-bearded Boy* and *The Far-off Hills*, for example, Lennox Robinson has given us pure comedy at its best. Especially in *The Far-off Hills*, with its quiet and gentle manner with ordinary people, there is penetration into the deeper recesses of life. The bedroom scene of the two little girls brings the essence of small-girlhood into the theatre, yet so elusively that one feels it and cannot define it or say wherein it lies. And in a moment between Marian and her father when he learns that she is engaged to be married, there is a sudden expansion of consciousness into the whole universal depth of love between father and daughter. The play brings much laughter into the theatre, all of

which is tender laughter as we laugh at those we love, the members of one's own family, and we go out from the theatre with the warm sense of having spent an evening with fine people. In both of Mr. Robinson's plays the illusion of closeness to life is enhanced by a technique of construction so flawless as completely to conceal the fact of technique. The skilfully cumulating comedy situations flow out of each other with an effect of guilelessness as though the dramatist had let the play write itself.

Between comedy and tragedy lies a field of drama not usually defined, the drama of heroism, of the power of man's will to achieve, not personal ends, but ends dictated by idealism, drama of man's capacity for self-forgetful loyalty. Such drama, like comedy, reveals a zest for life, a belief there are things worth doing and that, however difficult, they can be done, but the mood of high seriousness may come close to tragedy. Successful dramas of heroism are not numerous, perhaps because of the difficulty of drawing the delicate line between repellent perfection and uninspiring imperfection. Shakespeare wrote such a play, characteristically of his time, for the presentation of an ideal of kingship in *Henry V*, as Schiller according to his time and place presented a national hero in *William Tell*. Maxwell Anderson attempted such a national play in *Valley Forge*, but the heroism of medical research in *Yellow Jack* probably touches the American heart of our time more closely. Edmond Rostand, by abstracting the essence of heroic idealism and loyalty into the rococo extravagances of a seventeenth-century swashbuckler, wrote an heroic drama probably for all time in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The moving pictures have contributed worthily in this field, with recent note in the dramatizations of the lives of Pasteur and Zola. Heroic plays carry the invigorating identification of the audience with fine and gallant people in romantic comedy to a higher pitch, and they have the glory and beauty so often missed from social drama. They work constructively by inspiration, but unfortunately, human nature possesses an extraordinary resistance to being stimulated to demand more of itself than is comfortable. For that very reason, the theatre needs more such plays.

Tragedy, the drama of man and fate, has traditionally been deemed the highest form of the dramatic art. Comedy at the level of farce gives refreshing escape from the evils of life, and at its higher level identifies the audience with man's power to mold circumstance to his will and happiness. Social drama deals with evils which can be changed, and energizes the audience to constructive activity. But there are circumstances beyond human control and elements of evil and suffering in life beyond change. If every social evil were corrected, life still is correlated with death, as love with separation and loss. And man is finite, subject to error. Man is capable of no great goodness without the energy of passion, and passion misguided is proportionately destructive, as Othello, not in jealousy or anger, but "perplex'd in the extreme" and with passion for justice, destroyed what he most loved. The field of tragedy is the ultimate, metaphysical fact of evil in life, and its function is to lift the soul above it by revealing the power of man's spirit to transcend the evil which his mind and will cannot avert.

A great tragedy is one of the supreme paradoxes of experience. The audience is confronted with the full sweep and absoluteness of evil and suffering, and the effect at the resolution is a mood at once of exaltation and serenity. As Aristotle stated in his *Poetics*, tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear and its function is to effect a *katharsis* or purification of those emotions. Three conditions within the tragedy are essential to its proper effect of *katharsis*: magnitude in the force which overwhelms the protagonist, magnitude of character in the protagonist, and consciousness of a norm above and beyond the evil force. If the destructive force lacks magnitude to give a feeling of inevitability to the fate of the protagonist, his fate will only arouse rebellion without the resolution into serenity. If the character of the protagonist lacks magnitude there can be pity, but no terror, and no exaltation. Without revelation of a power beyond the evil force the terror would be unalleviated.

The Greek tragedians frequently symbolized the truth of inescapable fatality of circumstance in the tragic dilemma, as in the story of Orestes or that of Antigone. The char-

acter is caught between two laws; to observe one inescapably violates the other, and violation of either law incurs punishment. It was Orestes' duty to avenge his father's murder, but to do so meant the crime of killing his mother. It was Antigone's pious duty to perform the burial rites for her brother's body, but that act violated a decree of the state and was subject to punishment by death. Orestes and Antigone each chose the harder course. Fatality and decision overtook Oedipus in another manner; unwittingly he committed great crimes, and decreed upon himself the punishment due the crimes. In many Greek tragedies the element of chance, to which every man's life is subject, is in the foreground as the source of evil, but human passion and crime set the chain of circumstance in motion, as Orestes' fate goes back step by step causally to the crime of his ancestor, Atreus. Or the way to evil chance is opened by some flaw, an error or weakness, in an essentially great and good man, as in the rashness of Oedipus. Such causation does not weaken the pity or admiration of the audience for the protagonist, but gives a sense of awe before the strange and obscure workings of destiny and the precariousness of man's finite life in the midst of inscrutable powers.

In Shakespeare's tragedies the immediate source of evil is an evil human will; his tragedies have villains, an Iago, a Claudius, Goneril and Regan. The elements of chance, and of the tragic flaw in character, lie only in the fatal conjunction of character and character, or of character and circumstance. Othello's too guileless faith in a friend was played upon by the subtle Iago, and Lear's vanity and impetuosity were taken advantage of by Goneril and Regan, while Hamlet lamented that, at his time of weakness and melancholy, he should be called upon to set right the evils in his father's kingdom. In both the Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, the suffering is out of all proportion to any moral responsibility which can be traced to the protagonist; in other words, they are not dramas of justice, or of moral lesson, but dramas of the fatality which may overtake any man, and of how man meets his fate.

The emotional experience which, from Aristotle, we have

come to call katharsis is complex. The serenity is due in part to a very literal katharsis, a cleansing out, of emotional capacities not called into full play in ordinary life. The capacity for fear, without great occasion, attaches itself disproportionately in most people's lives to petty circumstances. After the great events of tragedy there is a feeling of calm and emotional purification. Also, the realization of inevitability and universality of suffering and its magnitude beyond the lives of the audience, allays their sense of rebellion against their own sufferings, the pain of the question, "Why should this happen to me?" People habitually look upon the universe in the light of themselves; before great tragedy they are drawn to see themselves in the light of the universe. But the serenity is but an opening of the spirit for exaltation, and the exaltation of tragedy, whether Greek, Shakespearean, or modern, is a response to the spectacle of man's power to maintain the integrity of his own mind and will in the face of the utmost life can inflict; it is the audience's identification with the glory of the race of which they are a part. Tragedy ends in catastrophe because in catastrophe the limit of man's nobility is assuredly revealed; in success there may always be reserve power not called upon. At the end of *Othello* and of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare sets the seal of his protagonists' integrity upon them. When Othello, learning of his error, turned his passion for justice upon himself, Cassio speaks as though it were an epitaph:

This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon;
For he was great of heart.

The glory of Hamlet is that in the bitterness of his disillusion and melancholy, he never gave up his purpose of duty; and when at last, with but a few moments to live, he has shaken off his weakness and acted triumphantly, Horatio pronounces upon his death, "There cracks a noble heart."

The question must inevitably arise, what of Shakespeare's tragedies with villain protagonists, as Richard III and Macbeth? In those plays there is exaltation in identification with the magnificent energies and faculties of the villain heroes,

the revelation in them of the power of man's will, together with tragic pity for the waste of such powers misdirected. Nevertheless, the katharsis from those plays, great dramas as they are, is an experience less full in scope than from *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, or *Othello*.

Great tragedy depends upon some kind of faith in the mind of the dramatist, a harmony between the direction of the integrity of his protagonist and some ultimate force in the universe, or the assertion of the protagonist's will would be but a desperate gesture. In Greek tragedy there is a moral law represented by divinity which justifies the essential integrity of the protagonists even while exacting expiation. In Shakespeare, the audience is made to feel a moral order in the universe in which an evil human will is a disruption. The evil is revealed and cast out, but is a force of terror which, in running its course to its own destruction, carries down to destruction the innocent and good, the occasion for the tragic pity for waste. But the moral order is unshaken. The destruction is physical, not spiritual; no character of essential good will in Shakespeare's dramas suffers moral disintegration. The character of the apparent exception, Macbeth, was weakly founded upon goodness of natural impulse rather than of will. Fearful as is the power of evil will to inflict suffering, the moral universe is made richer out of the conflict. Lear grows in humanity, and the capacities for loyalty and devotion of Cordelia are given realization. At the end comes the feeling of calm after storm and reassertion of the normal order. Maxwell Anderson in the introduction to the publication of his fine tragedy, *Winterset*, states his belief in the need in the modern world of the purification and exaltation of tragedy. He then says that he does not know what the faith of the modern world will be; he only has faith in the necessity of faith. Nevertheless, *Winterset* reveals itself as founded upon faith in an ideal, a principle, of love which cleanses the mind of Mio of hate and revenge.

Tragedy brings beauty and exaltation into the theatre. It reveals the noblest capacities of man, the exercise of his will and faculties to the utmost toward control of his destiny, and the power to transcend within the spirit the fate

which lies beyond control. Yet tragedy is not always obviously exalted, and all tragedy is not closed with death. In the stunted lives of *Tobacco Road* there are elements of tragic dignity, and O'Neill intended and achieved a gnarled and twisted tragic beauty in *Desire Under the Elms*. The modern theatre and its audience needs more of tragedy, of emotional enlargement beyond the social consciousness; at the same time, the modern social consciousness is opening new fields for tragedy. The material of *Winterset* would have been impossible to tragedy in the Greek or Elizabethan theatres, but in the closing lines of Esdras over the bodies of Miriamne and Mio, it is the timeless meaning of tragedy which is expressed:

This is the glory of earth-born men and women
not to cringe, never to yield, but standing,
take defeat implacable and defiant,
die unsubmitting. . . .

Man can stand up . . . and say,

. . . yet is my mind my own.

Now we must make a quick descent from the purely sublime and take a last glimpse at the whirling scene of many rings which is the theatre. The theatre, by its social setting, is the most various of all the arts in its functions and in the kinds of endeavor, the purposes and range of talents, which it welcomes. We have found there a great public forum, a battleground, a Maypole ring of Merrymount, a temple of the human spirit for festivals, sacrifices, and mysteries; we have found jesting, and joyousness, solemnity, indignation, wonder and beauty. Through all the varied modes of drama—except the propagandistic, and inadvertently there—moves the single purpose of all art, the enrichment of the human consciousness in intensified activity of the emotions and enlarged and sensitized perceptions. Art is neither purely expression, nor purely contemplation, but communication, expansion of the range of our understanding of human existence, of ourselves and one another. By its social set-

ting the theatre is the most dynamic and immediate in impact of communication of the arts, the most readily a mirror of fluctuating currents of thought and feeling of the day. At the same time, it is an institution of continuity, bringing to life the record of human experience in the drama of the past and creating drama for the future. Everyone who actually writes a play will find himself with an enriched responsiveness to all the theatre has to offer to its audience, and there is always the challenge that he may with his play cross over and face the audience of his day. A few among those who write their first plays in our day will speak to the audience of the future.

A NOTE ON WHAT TO DO WITH A PLAY AFTER IT IS WRITTEN

THE first thing to do with a play is to make or have made good typed copies. Best friends shouldn't be asked to read longhand manuscripts, and the author himself needs a clear copy for effective use. The next thing to do, if the play is going out in the world, is to have it copyrighted. The copyright procedure is simple and inexpensive. Write to the Register of Copyrights, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., for copyright application Form D2 and instruction blank. This form should be filled in and forwarded with a copy of the play and the filing fee of \$1.00 to the Copyright Office in accordance with their instruction. The manuscript is not returned to the author.

There are at least four things not to do with a play—to put the only copy in the mail, to let it lie in a drawer thinking one will do something with it some day, to throw it in the wastebasket in disgust, and to pass it around among friends to read in the hope of gathering a few compliments, or, a variation of the last, to read it when one's turn comes in a group of mutually admiring aspirants to literature. There are at least five constructive things to do with a play—try to get it professionally produced, try to sell it to one of the publishers who deal in plays for the amateur theatre, submit it to a contest, try to get it produced locally, and study it as apprentice work from which to learn to write a better play. To which of these ends the play is suited every author will, to a degree, have to decide for himself. The opinion, not of sympathetic friends or people who merely profess to love the theatre, but of a competent critic who is in a position to know the possibilities, may be very helpful.

If there is reason to believe the play has a chance for professional production, it should, in most cases, be submitted to a good drama agent. Some producers read large numbers

of plays submitted directly, and some even maintain a reading staff, but a large majority of the plays that are professionally produced come to the producers through agents. Unless one has a direct personal contact with a producer, submitting to an agent is certainly the most practical procedure. With the vast number of play manuscripts flooding into New York City, a selective process for the attention of producers is necessary, and the agents are organized for that purpose and depended on by the producers. The agent is also in a position to know what producers want plays at a given time, and sometimes the kind of play desired. Also, the agent's function does not end with placing the play, but includes representing the author in the business arrangements and following the play through in all the details that make for advantageous production. One of the services of the Dramatists' Guild, a division of the Authors' League of America, is to give its members information regarding agents. Full membership with the privilege of voting is open only to professional dramatists, but associate membership with "all the protection afforded to active members and all of the privileges except that of voting" is open to anyone for dues of \$8.00 a year. Application for membership, and requests for information, should be addressed: The Secretary, the Dramatists' Guild, No. 6 East 39th Street, New York. Nearly all of the drama agents are located in New York City. It is not in the least necessary, however, to go to New York with one's play; careful consideration as promptly as possible of all plays submitted by mail can be depended upon from any good agent. Producers and agents alike are earnestly seeking more good plays, and they may come from anywhere. There is no question, of course, since the agents like the producers are overwhelmed with unproduceable manuscripts, that a recommendation, if available, from someone in whose knowledge and judgment the agent has reason to place confidence is of assistance both to the author and to the agent. Agents, producers, and publishers will want a clearly typed manuscript in the form in which plays are printed, and prefer that the play be copyrighted for their protection as well as that of the author.

Professional production is a narrowly restricted field. The amateur theatre offers a much larger and more varied field, and one more easily available to the unknown dramatist. A number of publishers specialize in publication and production rights of plays for the amateur theatre, both one-act and long plays. Prominent among such publishers are Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York, and 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles; Row, Peterson and Co., 1911 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois; Banner Play Bureau, Inc., 111 Ellis Street, San Francisco; Northwestern Press, 2200 Park Avenue, Minneapolis; Fitzgerald Publishing Corporation, 11 East 38th Street, New York. The publishers located outside New York are cultivating to a degree the regional writing and production of plays, something to consider in deciding where to submit a play. Two years ago, a new market for one-act plays originated in Contemporary Play Publications, Inc., 112 West 42nd Street, New York, and *The One Act Play Magazine*, edited by William Kozlenko. Mr. Kozlenko has recently organized The One Act Repertory Company, Inc., extending the opportunity for production. The New Theatre League, 132 West Forty-third Street, New York, is a very active agency for "labor and progressive social plays."

In the field of drama for radio, the best way to start usually is through a local station, and work up from there, if successful, to the national broadcasts. Both the Columbia and the National Broadcasting Companies in New York, however, are introducing plays, as they can find them, of distinguished literary merit by new writers on their national hook-ups.

The broad national interest in the cultivation of drama has manifested itself in the last few years in a great number of playwriting contests with awards ranging all the way from opportunity for production or publication up to scholarships and fellowships of several hundred to as high as twenty-five hundred dollars, such as those of the Bureau of New Plays, and now the John Golden and the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships administered by the Dramatists' Guild. The contests have been local and national; limited to special groups,

as college students, people who have had no play produced, or one play produced, and open to all; specified as to subject matter, as a play of Lincoln's Indiana years, a labor play, a temperance play, and free to any subject. There have been contests for long plays and for one-act plays. The contests and awards have been offered by professional theatre people, by historical societies, labor organizations, religious organizations, amateur theatres university and community, and by interested individuals. The opportunities of such contests are doing much to encourage and assist the growing impulse toward drama. Among my own students and recent students, nine national awards have given stimulus and material aid in the past two years. There is, unfortunately, no clearing-house for announcement of all contests. They are publicized through the drama sections of newspapers, the New York newspapers especially if national, and through university courses in playwriting and amateur theatre organizations. More notices are to be found in the theatre publication *Variety* than in any other one source.

A special and large opportunity exists for students enrolled in writing courses at the University of Michigan through the Julie and Avery Hopwood Awards. Under the bequest of the late Avery Hopwood, approximately \$12,000 in cash prizes is awarded each year, divided between the four fields of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay. The highest awards may be as large as \$2500, or they may be distributed in smaller awards to a larger number of students.

The Noble and Noble Publishing Company of New York City has launched a plan this past year to encourage educational creative work in drama, the instituting of a yearbook of student-written, student-produced plays. "Each volume will contain about twenty of the best one-act plays of this type obtainable. Each play must have been written and produced by either college or high school students." No remuneration or royalties "other than the honor of having their plays published in a volume of national circulation" is intended for the first year, at least, but a certificate award is planned for each student "in recognition of his good work." Oscar E. Sams, Jr., Director of Dramatics, Knoxville High

School, Knoxville, Tennessee, has been asked to collect, select, and edit the plays for publication.

Whatever else any beginning dramatist who has written a play that merits production does with it, the first thing he should do is get it staged by some local group or organization if possible. That a play has been tried out on the stage in any manner whatsoever is always a help toward obtaining publication or larger production opportunity. What is more important to the beginning dramatist—after he recovers from his first delight just in hearing what he has written actually spoken by living actors, he will find the experience revealing for improving his play and his future writing. Above all, whether or not his play goes farther, he will be taking part in and contributing to the life of his community in a way that is rich in cultural and educational possibilities and human fellowship. Let it be remembered that elaborate and expensive facilities are not necessary. All that can be done in the way of scenery, stage mechanics and lighting, costume, and make-up should be developed, for those things broaden the experience offered in the theatre both for the audience and for the many whose talents are called into play. The aim of any community should be a theatre which is a house of many arts. But all that is necessary to have a play is a manuscript, actors, a director, a platform, and an audience.

To those who deeply want to learn to write plays, it will not seem a cold note on which to end that a great many first plays, and beyond first plays, will inevitably be apprentice work, a foundation upon which the art of dramatic writing will be built. Much advancement is gained by the act of writing, but more is to be gained by intensive and objective study of what one has done and failed to do. From such study will come fresh perceptions and insight which will fill the real aspirant to playwriting with eagerness to be at the next play.

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